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F E L I X H O L T

" Upon the midlands now the industrious muse doth fall,
The shires which we the heart of England well may call.

. . . . . .

My native country thou, which so brave spirits hast bred,
If there be virtues yet remaining in thy earth,
Or any good of thine thou bred'st into my birth,
Accept it as thine own, whilst now I sing of thee,
Of all thy later brood the unworthiest though I be."

DRAYTON : *Polyolbion.*

FELIX HOLT

THE RADICAL

BY

GEORGE ELIOT

AUTHOR OF 'ADAM BEDE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXVI

FELIX HOLT,

THE RADICAL.

CHAPTER XV.

And doubt shall be as lead upon the feet
Of thy most anxious will.

Mr Lyon was careful to look in at Felix as soon as possible after Christian's departure, to tell him that his trust was discharged. During the rest of the day he was somewhat relieved from agitating reflections by the necessity of attending to his ministerial duties, the rebuke of rebellious singers being one of them; and on his return from the Monday evening prayer-meeting he was so overcome with weariness that he went to bed without taking note of any objects in his study. But when he rose the

next morning, his mind, once more eagerly active, was arrested by Philip Debarry's letter, which still lay open on his desk, and was arrested by precisely that portion which had been unheeded the day before :—" *I shall consider myself doubly fortunate if at any time you can point out to me some method by which I may procure you as lively a satisfaction as I am now feeling, in that full and speedy relief from anxicty which I owe to your considerate conduct.*"

To understand how these words could carry the suggestion they actually had for the minister in a crisis of peculiar personal anxiety and struggle, we must bear in mind that for many years he had walked through life with the sense of having for a space been unfaithful to what he esteemed the highest trust ever committed to man—the ministerial vocation. In a mind of any nobleness, a lapse into transgression against an object still regarded as supreme, issues in a new and purer devotedness, chastised by humility and watched over by a passionate regret. So it was with that ardent spirit which animated the little body of Rufus Lyon. Once in his life he had been blinded, deafened, hurried along by rebellious impulse ; he had gone astray after his own desires, and had let the fire die

out on the altar; and as the true penitent, hating his self-besotted error, asks from all coming life duty instead of joy, and service instead of ease, so Rufus was perpetually on the watch lest he should ever again postpone to some private affection a great public opportunity which to him was equivalent to a command.

Now here was an opportunity brought by a combination of that unexpected incalculable kind which might be regarded as the Divine emphasis invoking especial attention to trivial events—an opportunity of securing what Rufus Lyon had often wished for as a means of honouring truth, and exhibiting error in the character of a stammering, halting, short-breathed usurper of office and dignity. What was more exasperating to a zealous preacher, with whom copious speech was not a difficulty but a relief — who never lacked argument, but only combatants and listeners—than to reflect that there were thousands on thousands of pulpits in this kingdom, supplied with handsome sounding-boards, and occupying an advantageous position in buildings far larger than the chapel in Malthouse Yard — buildings sure to be places of resort, even as the markets were, if only from habit and interest; and that these pulpits were filled, or

rather made vacuous, by men whose privileged education in the ancient centres of instruction issued in twenty minutes' formal reading of tepid exhortation or probably infirm deductions from premises based on rotten scaffolding? And it is in the nature of exasperation gradually to concentrate itself. The sincere antipathy of a dog towards cats in general, necessarily takes the form of indignant barking at the neighbour's black cat which makes daily trespass; the bark at imagined cats, though a frequent exercise of the canine mind, is yet comparatively feeble. Mr Lyon's sarcasm was not without an edge when he dilated in general on an elaborate education for teachers which issued in the minimum of teaching, but it found a whetstone in the particular example of that bad system known as the Rector of Treby Magna. There was nothing positive to be said against the Rev. Augustus Debarry; his life could not be pronounced blameworthy except for its negatives. And the good Rufus was too pure-minded not to be glad of that. He had no delight in vice as discrediting wicked opponents; he shrank from dwelling on the images of cruelty or of grossness, and his indignation was habitually inspired only by those moral and intellectual mistakes which darken the soul but do not injure or degrade

the temple of the body. If the Rector had been a less respectable man, Rufus would have more reluctantly made him an object of antagonism; but as an incarnation of soul-destroying error, dissociated from those baser sins which have no good repute even with the worldly, it would be an argumentative luxury to get into close quarters with him, and fight with a dialectic short-sword in the eyes of the Treby world (sending also a written account thereof to the chief organs of Dissenting opinion). Vice was essentially stupid—a deaf and eyeless monster, insusceptible to demonstration: the Spirit might work on it by unseen ways, and the unstudied sallies of sermons were often as the arrows which pierced and awakened the brutified conscience; but illuminated thought, finely-dividing speech, were the choicer weapons of the Divine armoury, which whoso could wield must be careful not to leave idle.

Here, then, was the longed-for opportunity. Here was an engagement—an expression of a strong wish—on the part of Philip Debarry, if it were in his power, to procure a satisfaction to Rufus Lyon. How had that man of God and exemplary Independent minister, Mr Ainsworth, of persecuted sanctity, conducted himself when a similar occasion had befallen

him at Amsterdam? He had thought of nothing but the glory of the highest cause, and had converted the offer of recompense into a public debate with a Jew on the chief mysteries of the faith. Here was a model: the case was nothing short of a heavenly indication, and he, Rufus Lyon, would seize the occasion to demand a public debate with the Rector on the Constitution of the true Church.

What if he were inwardly torn by doubt and anxiety concerning his own private relations and the facts of his past life? That danger of absorption within the narrow bounds of self only urged him the more towards action which had a wider bearing, and might tell on the welfare of England at large. It was decided. Before the minister went down to his breakfast that morning he had written the following letter to Mr Philip Debarry:—

Sir,—Referring to your letter of yesterday, I find the following words: "I shall consider myself doubly fortunate if at any time you can point out to me some method by which I may procure you as lively a satisfaction as I am now feeling, in that full and speedy relief from anxiety which I owe to your considerate conduct."

I am not unaware, sir, that, in the usage of the

world, there are words of courtesy (so called) which are understood, by those amongst whom they are current, to have no precise meaning, and to constitute no bond or obligation. I will not now insist that this is an abuse of language, wherein our fallible nature requires the strictest safeguards against laxity and misapplication, for I do not apprehend that in writing the words I have above quoted, you were open to the reproach of using phrases which, while seeming to carry a specific meaning, were really no more than what is called a polite form. I believe, sir, that you used these words advisedly, sincerely, and with an honourable intention of acting on them as a pledge, should such action be demanded. No other supposition on my part would correspond to the character you bear as a young man who aspires (albeit mistakenly) to engraft the finest fruits of public virtue on a creed and institutions, whereof the sap is composed rather of human self-seeking than of everlasting truth.

Wherefore I act on this my belief in the integrity of your written word; and I beg you to procure for me (as it is doubtless in your power) that I may be allowed a public discussion with your near relative, the Rector of this parish, the Reverend Augustus Debarry, to be held in the large room of the Free School,

or in the Assembly Room of the Marquis of Granby, these being the largest covered spaces at our command. For I presume he would neither allow me to speak within his church, nor would consent himself to speak within my chapel; and the probable inclemency of the approaching season forbids an assured expectation that we could discourse in the open air. The subjects I desire to discuss are,—first, the Constitution of the true Church; and, secondly, the bearing thereupon of the English Reformation. Confidently expecting that you will comply with this request, which is the sequence of your expressed desire, I remain, sir, yours, with the respect offered to a sincere withstander,

RUFUS LYON.

Malthouse Yard.

After writing this letter, the good Rufus felt that serenity and elevation of mind which is infallibly brought by a preoccupation with the wider relations of things. Already he was beginning to sketch the course his argument might most judiciously take in the coming debate; his thoughts were running into sentences, and marking off careful exceptions in parentheses; and he had come down and seated himself at the breakfast-table quite automatically, without expectation of toast

or coffee, when Esther's voice and touch recalled him to an inward debate of another kind, in which he felt himself much weaker. Again there arose before him the image of that cool, hard-eyed, worldly man, who might be this dear child's father, and one against whose rights he had himself grievously offended. Always as the image recurred to him Mr Lyon's heart sent forth a prayer for guidance, but no definite guidance had yet made itself visible for him. It could not be guidance—it was a temptation—that said, "Let the matter rest: seek to know no more; know only what is thrust upon you." The remembrance that in his time of wandering he had wilfully remained in ignorance of facts which he might have inquired after, deepened the impression that it was now an imperative duty to seek the fullest attainable knowledge. And the inquiry might possibly issue in a blessed repose, by putting a negative on all his suspicions. But the more vividly all the circumstances became present to him, the more unfit he felt himself to set about any investigation concerning this man who called himself Maurice Christian. He could seek no confidant or helper among "the brethren;" he was obliged to admit to himself that the members of

his church, with whom he hoped to go to heaven, were not easy to converse with on earth touching the deeper secrets of his experience, and were still less able to advise him as to the wisest procedure, in a case of high delicacy, with a worldling who had a carefully-trimmed whisker and a fashionable costume. For the first time in his life it occurred to the minister that he should be glad of an adviser who had more worldly than spiritual experience, and that it might not be inconsistent with his principles to seek some light from one who had studied human law. But it was a thought to be paused upon, and not followed out rashly; some other guidance might intervene.

Esther noticed that her father was in a fit of abstraction, that he seemed to swallow his coffee and toast quite unconsciously, and that he vented from time to time a low guttural interjection, which was habitual with him when he was absorbed by an inward discussion. She did not disturb him by remarks, and only wondered whether anything unusual had occurred on Sunday evening. But at last she thought it needful to say, "You recollect what I told you yesterday, father?"

"Nay, child; what?" said Mr Lyon, rousing himself.

"That Mr Jermyn asked me if you would probably be at home this morning before one o'clock."

Esther was surprised to see her father start and change colour as if he had been shaken by some sudden collision before he answered,

"Assuredly; I do not intend to move from my study after I have once been out to give this letter to Zachary."

"Shall I tell Lyddy to take him up at once to your study if he comes? If not, I shall have to stay in my own room, because I shall be at home all this morning, and it is rather cold now to sit without a fire."

"Yes, my dear, let him come up to me; unless, indeed, he should bring a second person, which might happen, seeing that in all likelihood he is coming, as hitherto, on electioneering business. And I could not well accommodate two visitors up-stairs."

While Mr Lyon went out to Zachary, the pew-opener, to give him a second time the commission of carrying a letter to Treby Manor, Esther gave her injunction to Lyddy that if one gentleman came he was to be shown up-stairs—if two, they were to be shown into the parlour. But she had to resolve various questions before Lyddy clearly saw what was expected of her,—as that, "if it was

the gentleman as came on Thursday in the pepper-and-salt coat, was he to be shown up-stairs? And the gentleman from the Manor yesterday as went out whistling—had Miss Esther heard about him? There seemed no end of these great folks coming to Malthouse Yard since there was talk of the election; but they might be poor lost creatures the most of 'em." Whereupon Lyddy shook her head and groaned, under an edifying despair as to the future lot of gentlemen callers.

Esther always avoided asking questions of Lyddy, who found an answer as she found a key, by pouring out a pocketful of miscellanies. But she had remarked so many indications that something had happened to cause her father unusual excitement and mental preoccupation, that she could not help connecting with them the fact of this visit from the Manor, which he had not mentioned to her.

She sat down in the dull parlour and took up her netting; for since Sunday she had felt unable to read when she was alone, being obliged, in spite of herself, to think of Felix Holt—to imagine what he would like her to be, and what sort of views he took of life so as to make it seem valuable in the absence of all elegance, luxury, gaiety, or romance. Had he yet reflected that he had behaved very

rudely to her on Sunday? Perhaps not. Perhaps he had dismissed her from his mind with contempt. And at that thought Esther's eyes smarted unpleasantly. She was fond of netting, because it showed to advantage both her hand and her foot; and across this image of Felix Holt's indifference and contempt there passed the vaguer image of a possible somebody who would admire her hands and feet, and delight in looking at their beauty, and long, yet not dare, to kiss them. Life would be much easier in the presence of such a love. But it was precisely this longing after her own satisfaction that Felix had reproached her with. Did he want her to be heroic? That seemed impossible without some great occasion. Her life was a heap of fragments, and so were her thoughts: some great energy was needed to bind them together. Esther was beginning to lose her complacency at her own wit and criticism; to lose the sense of superiority in an awakening need for reliance on one whose vision was wider, whose nature was purer and stronger than her own. But then, she said to herself, that "one" must be tender to her, not rude and predominating in his manners. A man with any chivalry in him could never adopt a scolding tone towards a woman—that is, towards a charming woman. But

Felix had no chivalry in him. He loved lecturing and opinion too well ever to love any woman.

In this way Esther strove to see that Felix was thoroughly in the wrong — at least, if he did not come again expressly to show that he was sorry.

CHAPTER XVI.

Trueblue. These men have no votes. Why should I court them?
Greyfox. No votes, but power.
Trueblue. What! over charities?
Greyfox. No, over brains; which disturbs the canvass. In a natural state of things the average price of a vote at Paddlebrook is nine-and-sixpence, throwing the fifty-pound tenants, who cost nothing, into the divisor. But these talking men cause an artificial rise of prices.

THE expected important knock at the door came about twelve o'clock, and Esther could hear that there were two visitors. Immediately the parlour door was opened and the shaggy-haired, cravatless image of Felix Holt, which was just then full in the mirror of Esther's mind, was displaced by the highly-contrasted appearance of a personage whose name she guessed before Mr Jermyn had announced it. The perfect morning costume of that day differed much from our present ideal: it was essential that a gentleman's chin should be well propped, that his collar should have a voluminous roll, that his waistcoat should imply much discrimination, and that his buttons should be arranged in a

manner which would now expose him to general contempt. And it must not be forgotten that at the distant period when Treby Magna first knew the excitements of an election, there existed many other anomalies now obsolete, besides short-waisted coats and broad stiffeners.

But we have some notions of beauty and fitness which withstand the centuries; and quite irrespective of dates, it would be pronounced that at the age of thirty-four Harold Transome was a striking and handsome man. He was one of those people, as Denner had remarked, to whose presence in the room you could not be indifferent: if you do not hate or dread them, you must find the touch of their hands, nay, their very shadows, agreeable.

Esther felt a pleasure quite new to her as she saw his finely-embrowned face and full bright eyes turned towards her with an air of deference by which gallantry must commend itself to a refined woman who is not absolutely free from vanity. Harold Transome regarded women as slight things, but he was fond of slight things in the intervals of business; and he held it among the chief arts of life to keep these pleasant diversions within such bounds that they should never interfere with the course of his serious ambition.

Esther was perfectly aware, as he took a chair near her, that he was under some admiring surprise at her appearance and manner. How could it be otherwise? She believed that in the eyes of a high-bred man no young lady in Treby could equal her: she felt a glow of delight at the sense that she was being looked at.

"My father expected you," she said to Mr Jermyn. "I delivered your letter to him yesterday. He will be down immediately."

She disentangled her foot from her netting and wound it up.

"I hope you are not going to let us disturb you," said Harold, noticing her action. "We come to discuss election affairs, and we particularly desire to interest the ladies."

"I have no interest with any one who is not already on the right side," said Esther, smiling.

"I am happy to see at least that you wear the Liberal colours."

"I fear I must confess that it is more from love of blue than from love of Liberalism. Yellow opinions could only have brunettes on their side." Esther spoke with her usual pretty fluency, but she had no sooner uttered the words than she thought how angry they would have made Felix.

"If my cause is to be recommended by the becomingness of my colours, then I am sure you are acting in my interest by wearing them."

Esther rose to leave the room.

"Must you really go?" said Harold, preparing to open the door for her.

"Yes; I have an engagement—a lesson at half-past twelve," said Esther, bowing and floating out like a blue-robed Naïad, but not without a suffused blush as she passed through the doorway.

It was a pity the room was so small, Harold Transome thought: this girl ought to walk in a house where there were halls and corridors. But he had soon dismissed this chance preoccupation with Esther; for before the door was closed again Mr Lyon had entered, and Harold was entirely bent on what had been the object of his visit. The minister, though no elector himself, had considerable influence over Liberal electors, and it was the part of wisdom in a candidate to cement all political adhesion by a little personal regard, if possible. Garstin was a harsh and wiry fellow; he seemed to suggest that sour whey, which some say was the original meaning of Whig in the Scottish, and it might assist the theoretic advantages of Radicalism if it could be associated with a more generous pre-

sence. What would conciliate the personal regard of old Mr Lyon became a curious problem to Harold, now the little man made his appearance. But canvassing makes a gentleman acquainted with many strange animals, together with the ways of catching and taming them; and thus the knowledge of natural history advances amongst the aristocracy and the wealthy commoners of our land.

"I am very glad to have secured this opportunity of making your personal acquaintance, Mr Lyon," said Harold, putting out his hand to the minister when Jermyn had mentioned his name. "I am to address the electors here, in the Market-Place, to-morrow; and I should have been sorry to do so without first paying my respects privately to my chief friends, as there may be points on which they particularly wish me to explain myself."

"You speak civilly, sir, and reasonably," said Mr Lyon, with a vague shortsighted gaze, in which a candidate's appearance evidently went for nothing. "Pray be seated, gentlemen. It is my habit to stand."

He placed himself at a right angle with his visitors, his worn look of intellectual eagerness, slight frame, and rusty attire, making an odd contrast with their flourishing persons, unblemished costume,

and comfortable freedom from excitement. The group was fairly typical of the difference between the men who are animated by ideas and the men who are expected to apply them. Then he drew forth his spectacles, and began to rub them with the thin end of his coat-tail. He was inwardly exercising great self-mastery—suppressing the thought of his personal needs, which Jermyn's presence tended to suggest, in order that he might be equal to the larger duties of this occasion.

"I am aware—Mr Jermyn has told me," said Harold, "what good service you have done me already, Mr Lyon. The fact is, a man of intellect like you was especially needed in my case. The race I am running is really against Garstin only, who calls himself a Liberal, though he cares for nothing, and understands nothing, except the interests of the wealthy traders. And you have been able to explain the difference between Liberal and Liberal, which, as you and I know, is something like the difference between fish and fish."

"Your comparison is not unapt, sir," said Mr Lyon, still holding his spectacles in his hand, "at this epoch, when the mind of the nation has been strained on the passing of one measure. Where a great weight has to be moved, we require not so

much selected instruments as abundant horse-power. But it is an unavoidable evil of these massive achievements that they encourage a coarse undiscriminatingness obstructive of more nicely-wrought results, and an exaggerated expectation inconsistent with the intricacies of our fallen and struggling condition. I say not that compromise is unnecessary, but it is an evil attendant on our imperfection; and I would pray every one to mark that, where compromise broadens, intellect and conscience are thrust into narrower room. Wherefore it has been my object to show our people that there are many who have helped to draw the car of Reform, whose ends are but partial, and who forsake not the ungodly principle of selfish alliances, but would only substitute Syria for Egypt — thinking chiefly of their own share in peacocks, gold, and ivory."

"Just so," said Harold, who was quick at new languages, and still quicker at translating other men's generalities into his own special and immediate purposes, "men who will be satisfied if they can only bring in a plutocracy, buy up the land, and stick the old crests on their new gateways. Now the practical point to secure against these false Liberals at present is, that our electors should not

divide their votes. As it appears that many who vote for Debarry are likely to split their votes in favour of Garstin, it is of the first consequence that my voters should give me plumpers. If they divide their votes they can't keep out Debarry, and they may help to keep out me. I feel some confidence in asking you to use your influence in this direction, Mr Lyon. We candidates have to praise ourselves more than is graceful; but you are aware that, while I belong by my birth to the classes that have their roots in tradition and all the old loyalties, my experience has lain chiefly among those who make their own career, and depend on the new rather than the old. I have had the advantage of considering national welfare under varied lights: I have wider views than those of a mere cotton lord. On questions connected with religious liberty I would stop short at no measure that was not thorough."

"I hope not, sir—I hope not," said Mr Lyon, gravely; finally putting on his spectacles and examining the face of the candidate, whom he was preparing to turn into a catechumen. For the good Rufus, conscious of his political importance as an organ of persuasion, felt it his duty to catechise a little, and also to do his part towards impressing a

probable legislator with a sense of his responsibility. But the latter branch of duty somewhat obstructed the catechising, for his mind was so urged by considerations which he held in danger of being overlooked, that the questions and answers bore a very slender proportion to his exposition. It was impossible to leave the question of church-rates without noting the grounds of their injustice, and without a brief enumeration of reasons why Mr Lyon, for his own part, would not present that passive resistance to a legal imposition which had been adopted by the Friends (whose heroism in this regard was nevertheless worthy of all honour).

Comprehensive talkers are apt to be tiresome when we are not athirst for information, but, to be quite fair, we must admit that superior reticence is a good deal due to the lack of matter. Speech is often barren; but silence also does not necessarily brood over a full nest. Your still fowl, blinking at you without remark, may all the while be sitting on one addled nest-egg; and when it takes to cackling, will have nothing to announce but that addled delusion.

Harold Transome was not at all a patient man, but in matters of business he was quite awake to his cue, and in this case it was perhaps easier to

listen than to answer questions. But Jermyn, who had plenty of work on his hands, took an opportunity of rising, and saying, as he looked at his watch,

"I must really be at the office in five minutes. You will find me there, Mr Transome; you have probably still many things to say to Mr Lyon."

"I beseech you, sir," said the minister, changing colour, and by a quick movement laying his hand on Jermyn's arm—"I beseech you to favour me with an interview on some private business—this evening, if it were possible."

Mr Lyon, like others who are habitually occupied with impersonal subjects, was liable to this impulsive sort of action. He snatched at the details of life as if they were darting past him—as if they were like the ribbons at his knees, which would never be tied all day if they were not tied on the instant. Through these spasmodic leaps out of his abstractions into real life, it constantly happened that he suddenly took a course which had been the subject of too much doubt with him ever to have been determined on by continuous thought. And if Jermyn had not startled him by threatening to vanish just when he was plunged in politics, he might never have made up his mind to confide in a worldly attorney.

(" An odd man," as Mrs Muscat observed, " to have such a gift in the pulpit. But there's One knows better than we do——" which, in a lady who rarely felt her judgment at a loss, was a concession that showed much piety.)

Jermyn was surprised at the little man's eagerness. " By all means," he answered, quite cordially. " Could you come to my office at eight o'clock?"

" For several reasons, I must beg you to come to me."

" O, very good. I'll walk out and see you this evening, if possible. I shall have much pleasure in being of any use to you." Jermyn felt that in the eyes of Harold he was appearing all the more valuable when his services were thus in request. He went out, and Mr Lyon easily relapsed into politics, for he had been on the brink of a favourite subject on which he was at issue with his fellow-Liberals.

At that time, when faith in the efficacy of political change was at fever-heat in ardent Reformers, many measures which men are still discussing with little confidence on either side, were then talked about and disposed of like property in near reversion. Crying abuses—"bloated paupers," "bloated pluralists," and other corruptions hindering men from being wise and happy—had to be fought against and slain. Such

a time is a time of hope. Afterwards, when the corpses of those monsters have been held up to the public wonder and abhorrence, and yet wisdom and happiness do not follow, but rather a more abundant breeding of the foolish and unhappy, comes a time of doubt and despondency. But in the great Reform-year Hope was mighty: the prospect of Reform had even served the voters instead of drink; and in one place, at least, there had been a "dry election." And now the speakers at Reform banquets were exuberant in congratulation and promise: Liberal clergymen of the Establishment toasted Liberal Catholic clergymen without any allusion to scarlet, and Catholic clergymen replied with a like tender reserve. Some dwelt on the abolition of all abuses, and on millennial blessedness generally; others, whose imaginations were less suffused with exhalations of the dawn, insisted chiefly on the ballot-box.

Now on this question of the ballot the minister strongly took the negative side. Our pet opinions are usually those which place us in a minority of a minority amongst our own party:—very happily, else those poor opinions, born with no silver spoon in their mouths—how would they get nourished and fed? So it was with Mr Lyon and his objection to

the ballot. But he had thrown out a remark on the subject which was not quite clear to his hearer, who interpreted it according to his best calculation of probabilities.

"I have no objection to the ballot," said Harold, "but I think that is not the sort of thing we have to work at just now. We shouldn't get it. And other questions are imminent."

"Then, sir, you would vote for the ballot?" said Mr Lyon, stroking his chin.

"Certainly, if the point came up. I have too much respect for the freedom of the voter to oppose anything which offers a chance of making that freedom more complete."

Mr Lyon looked at the speaker with a pitying smile and a subdued "h'm—m—m," which Harold took for a sign of satisfaction. He was soon undeceived.

"You grieve me, sir; you grieve me much. And I pray you to reconsider this question, for it will take you to the root, as I think, of political morality. I engage to show to any impartial mind, duly furnished with the principles of public and private rectitude, that the ballot would be pernicious, and that if it were not pernicious it would still be futile. I will show, first, that it would be futile as a preserva-

tive from bribery and illegitimate influence; and, secondly, that it would be in the worst kind pernicious, as shutting the door against those influences whereby the soul of a man and the character of a citizen are duly educated for their great functions. Be not alarmed if I detain you, sir. It is well worth the while."

"Confound this old man," thought Harold. "I'll never make a canvassing call on a preacher again, unless he has lost his voice from a cold." He was going to excuse himself as prudently as he could, by deferring the subject till the morrow, and inviting Mr Lyon to come to him in the committee-room before the time appointed for his public speech; but he was relieved by the opening of the door. Lyddy put in her head to say,

"If you please, sir, here's Mr Holt wants to know if he may come in and speak to the gentleman. He begs your pardon, but you're to say 'no' if you don't like him to come."

"Nay, show him in at once, Lyddy. A young man," Mr Lyon went on, speaking to Harold, "whom a representative ought to know—no voter, but a man of ideas and study."

"He is thoroughly welcome," said Harold, truthfully enough, though he felt little interest in the

voteless man of ideas except as a diversion from the subject of the ballot. He had been standing for the last minute or two, feeling less of a victim in that attitude, and more able to calculate on means of escape.

"Mr Holt, sir," said the minister, as Felix entered, "is a young friend of mine, whose opinions on some points I hope to see altered, but who has a zeal for public justice which I trust he will never lose."

"I am glad to see Mr Holt," said Harold, bowing. He perceived from the way in which Felix bowed to him and turned to the most distant spot in the room, that the candidate's shake of the hand would not be welcome here. "A formidable fellow," he thought, "capable of mounting a cart in the market-place to-morrow and cross-examining me, if I say anything that doesn't please him."

"Mr Lyon," said Felix, "I have taken a liberty with you in asking to see Mr Transome when he is engaged with you. But I have to speak to him on a matter which I shouldn't care to make public at present, and it is one on which I am sure you will back me. I heard that Mr Transome was here, so I ventured to come. I hope you will both excuse me, as my business refers to some electioneer-

ing measures which are being taken by Mr Transome's agents."

"Pray go on," said Harold, expecting something unpleasant.

"I'm not going to speak against treating voters," said Felix; "I suppose buttered ale, and grease of that sort to make the wheels go, belong to the necessary humbug of Representation. But I wish to ask you, Mr Transome, whether it is with your knowledge that agents of yours are bribing rough fellows who are no voters—the colliers and navvies at Sproxton—with the chance of extra drunkenness, that they may make a posse on your side at the nomination and polling?"

"Certainly not," said Harold. "You are aware, my dear sir, that a candidate is very much at the mercy of his agents as to the means by which he is returned, especially when many years' absence has made him a stranger to the men actually conducting business. But are you sure of your facts?"

"As sure as my senses can make me," said Felix, who then briefly described what had happened on Sunday. "I believed that you were ignorant of all this, Mr Transome," he ended, "and that was why I thought some good might be done by speaking to you. If not, I should be tempted to expose

the whole affair as a disgrace to the Radical party. I'm a Radical myself, and mean to work all my life long against privilege, monopoly, and oppression. But I would rather be a livery-servant proud of my master's title, than I would seem to make common cause with scoundrels who turn the best hopes of men into by-words for cant and dishonesty."

"Your energetic protest is needless here, sir," said Harold, offended at what sounded like a threat, and was certainly premature enough to be in bad taste. In fact, this error of behaviour in Felix proceeded from a repulsion which was mutual. It was a constant source of irritation to him that the public men on his side were, on the whole, not conspicuously better than the public men on the other side; that the spirit of innovation, which with him was a part of religion, was in many of its mouthpieces no more of a religion than the faith in rotten boroughs; and he was thus predisposed to distrust Harold Transome. Harold, in his turn, disliked impracticable notions of loftiness and purity—disliked all enthusiasm; and he thought he saw a very troublesome, vigorous incorporation of that nonsense in Felix. But it would be foolish to exasperate him in any way.

"If you choose to accompany me to Jermyn's

office," he went on, "the matter shall be inquired into in your presence. I think you will agree with me, Mr Lyon, that this will be the most satisfactory course?"

"Doubtless," said the minister, who liked the candidate very well, and believed that he would be amenable to argument; "and I would caution my young friend against a too great hastiness of words and action. David's cause against Saul was a righteous one; nevertheless not all who clave unto David were righteous men."

"The more was the pity, sir," said Felix. "Especially if he winked at their malpractices."

Mr Lyon smiled, shook his head, and stroked his favourite's arm deprecatingly.

"It is rather too much for any man to keep the consciences of all his party," said Harold. "If you had lived in the East, as I have, you would be more tolerant. More tolerant, for example, of an active industrious selfishness, such as we have here, though it may not always be quite scrupulous: you would see how much better it is than an idle selfishness. I have heard it said, a bridge is a good thing—worth helping to make, though half the men who worked at it were rogues."

"O yes!" said Felix, scornfully, "give me a

handful of generalities and analogies, and I'll undertake to justify Burke and Hare, and prove them benefactors of their species. I'll tolerate no nuisances but such as I can't help; and the question now is, not whether we can do away with all the nuisances in the world, but with a particular nuisance under our noses."

"Then we had better cut the matter short, as I propose, by going at once to Jermyn's," said Harold. "In that case, I must bid you good-morning, Mr Lyon."

"I would fain," said the minister, looking uneasy —"I would fain have had a further opportunity of considering that question of the ballot with you. The reasons against it need not be urged lengthily; they only require complete enumeration to prevent any seeming hiatus, where an opposing fallacy might thrust itself in."

"Never fear, sir," said Harold, shaking Mr Lyon's hand cordially, "there will be opportunities. Shall I not see you in the committee-room to-morrow?"

"I think not," said Mr Lyon, rubbing his brow, with a sad remembrance of his personal anxieties. "But I will send you, if you will permit me, a brief writing, on which you can meditate at your leisure."

"I shall be delighted. Good-bye."

Harold and Felix went out together; and the minister, going up to his dull study, asked himself whether, under the pressure of conflicting experience, he had faithfully discharged the duties of the past interview?

If a cynical sprite were present, riding on one of the motes in that dusty room, he may have made himself merry at the illusions of the little minister who brought so much conscience to bear on the production of so slight an effect. I confess to smiling myself, being sceptical as to the effect of ardent appeals and nice distinctions on gentlemen who are got up, both inside and out, as candidates in the style of the period; but I never smiled at Mr Lyon's trustful energy without falling to penitence and veneration immediately after. For what we call illusions are often, in truth, a wider vision of past and present realities—a willing movement of a man's soul with the larger sweep of the world's forces—a movement towards a more assured end than the chances of a single life. We see human heroism broken into units and say, this unit did little—might as well not have been. But in this way we might break up a great army into units; in this way we might break the sunlight into fragments, and think that this and the other might be cheaply parted

with. Let us rather raise a monument to the soldiers whose brave hearts only kept the ranks unbroken, and met death—a monument to the faithful who were not famous, and who are precious as the continuity of the sunbeams is precious, though some of them fall unseen and on barrenness.

At present, looking back on that day at Treby, it seems to me that the sadder illusion lay with Harold Transome, who was trusting in his own skill to shape the success of his own morrows, ignorant of what many yesterdays had determined for him beforehand.

CHAPTER XVII.

It is a good and soothfast saw;
Half-roasted never will be raw;
No dough is dried once more to meal,
No crock new-shapen by the wheel;
You can't turn curds to milk again,
Nor Now, by wishing, back to Then;
And having tasted stolen honey,
You can't buy innocence for money.

JERMYN was not particularly pleased that some chance had apparently hindered Harold Transome from making other canvassing visits immediately after leaving Mr Lyon, and so had sent him back to the office earlier than he had been expected to come. The inconvenient chance he guessed at once to be represented by Felix Holt, whom he knew very well by Trebian report to be a young man with so little of the ordinary Christian motives as to making an appearance and getting on in the world, that he presented no handle to any judicious and respectable person who might be willing to make use of him.

Harold Transome, on his side, was a good deal

annoyed at being worried by Felix into an inquiry about electioneering details. The real dignity and honesty there was in him made him shrink from this necessity of satisfying a man with a troublesome tongue; it was as if he were to show indignation at the discovery of one barrel with a false bottom, when he had invested his money in a manufactory where a larger or smaller number of such barrels had always been made. A practical man must seek a good end by the only possible means; that is to say, if he is to get into Parliament he must not be too particular. It was not disgraceful to be neither a Quixote nor a theorist, aiming to correct the moral rules of the world; but whatever actually was, or might prove to be, disgraceful, Harold held in detestation. In this mood he pushed on unceremoniously to the inner office without waiting to ask questions; and when he perceived that Jermyn was not alone, he said, with haughty quickness,

"A question about the electioneering at Sproxton. Can you give your attention to it at once? Here is Mr Holt, who has come to me about the business."

"A—yes—a—certainly," said Jermyn, who, as usual, was the more cool and deliberate because he

was vexed. He was standing, and, as he turned round, his broad figure concealed the person who was seated writing at the bureau. "Mr Holt—a—will doubtless—a—make a point of saving a busy man's time. You can speak at once. This gentleman"—here Jermyn made a slight backward movement of the head—"is one of ourselves; he is a true-blue."

'I have simply to complain," said Felix, "that one of your agents has been sent on a bribing expedition to Sproxton—with what purpose you, sir, may know better than I do. Mr Transome, it appears, was ignorant of the affair, and does not approve it."

Jermyn, looking gravely and steadily at Felix while he was speaking, at the same time drew forth a small sheaf of papers from his side-pocket, and then, as he turned his eyes slowly on Harold, felt in his waistcoat-pocket for his pencil-case.

"I don't approve it at all," said Harold, who hated Jermyn's calculated slowness and conceit in his own impenetrability. "Be good enough to put a stop to it, will you?"

"Mr Holt, I know, is an excellent Liberal," said Jermyn, just inclining his head to Harold, and then alternately looking at Felix and docketing his bills; "but he is perhaps too inexperienced to be aware

that no canvass—a—can be conducted without the action of able men, who must—a—be trusted, and not interfered with. And as to any possibility of promising to put a stop — a — to any procedure — a — that depends. If he had ever held the coachman's ribbons in his hands, as I have in my younger days—a—he would know that stopping is not always easy."

"I know very little about holding ribbons," said Felix; "but I saw clearly enough at once that more mischief had been done than could be well mended. Though I believe, if it were heartily tried, the treating might be reduced, and something might be done to hinder the men from turning out in a body to make a noise, which might end in worse."

"They might be hindered from making a noise on our side," said Jermyn, smiling. "That is perfectly true. But if they made a noise on the other —would your purpose be answered better, sir?"

Harold was moving about in an irritated manner while Felix and Jermyn were speaking. He preferred leaving the talk to the attorney, of whose talk he himself liked to keep as clear as possible.

"I can only say," answered Felix, "that if you make use of those heavy fellows when the drink is in them, I shouldn't like your responsibility. You

might as well drive bulls to roar on our side as bribe a set of colliers and navvies to shout and groan."

"A lawyer may well envy your command of language, Mr Holt," said Jermyn, pocketing his bills again, and shutting up his pencil; "but he would not be satisfied with the accuracy—a—of your terms. You must permit me to check your use of the word 'bribery.' The essence of bribery is, that it should be legally proved; there is not such a thing—a—*in rerum natura*—a—as unproved bribery. There has been no such thing as bribery at Sproxton, I'll answer for it. The presence of a body of stalwart fellows on—a—the Liberal side will tend to preserve order; for we know that the benefit clubs from the Pitchley district will show for Debarry. Indeed, the gentleman who has conducted the canvass at Sproxton is experienced in Parliamentary affairs, and would not exceed—a—the necessary measures that a rational judgment would dictate."

"What! you mean the man who calls himself Johnson?" said Felix, in a tone of disgust.

Before Jermyn chose to answer, Harold broke in, saying, quickly and peremptorily, "The long and the short of it is this, Mr Holt: I shall desire and

insist that whatever can be done by way of remedy shall be done. Will that satisfy you? You see now some of a candidate's difficulties?" said Harold, breaking into his most agreeable smile. "I hope you will have some pity for me."

"I suppose I must be content," said Felix, not thoroughly propitiated. "I bid you good-morning, gentlemen."

When he was gone out, and had closed the door behind him, Harold, turning round and flashing, in spite of himself, an angry look at Jermyn, said,

"And who is Johnson? an *alias*, I suppose. It seems you are fond of the name."

Jermyn turned perceptibly paler, but disagreeables of this sort between himself and Harold had been too much in his anticipations of late for him to be taken by surprise. He turned quietly round and just touched the shoulder of the person seated at the bureau, who now rose.

"On the contrary," Jermyn answered, "the Johnson in question is this gentleman, whom I have the pleasure of introducing to you as one of my most active helpmates in electioneering business — Mr Johnson, of Bedford Row, London. I am comparatively a novice—a—in these matters. But he was engaged with James Putty in two hardly-contested

elections, and there could scarcely be a better initiation. Putty is one of the first men of the country as an agent—a—on the Liberal side—a—eh, Johnson? I think Makepiece is—a—not altogether a match for him, not quite of the same calibre—a—*haud consimili ingenio*—a—in tactics—a—and in experience?"

"Makepiece is a wonderful man, and so is Putty," said the glib Johnson, too vain not to be pleased with an opportunity of speaking, even when the situation was rather awkward. "Makepiece for scheming, but Putty for management. Putty knows men, sir," he went on, turning to Harold; "it's a thousand pities that you have not had his talents employed in your service. He's beyond any man for saving a candidate's money—does half the work with his tongue. He'll talk of anything, from the Areopagus, and that sort of thing, down to the joke about 'Where are you going, Paddy?'—you know what I mean, sir! 'Back again, says Paddy'—an excellent electioneering joke. Putty understands these things. He has said to me, 'Johnson, bear in mind there are two ways of speaking an audience will always like: one is, to tell them what they don't understand; and the other is, to tell them what they're

used to.' I shall never be the man to deny that I owe a great deal to Putty. I always say it was a most providential thing in the Mugham election last year that Putty was not on the Tory side. He managed the women; and, if you'll believe me, sir, one fourth of the men would never have voted if their wives hadn't driven them to it for the good of their families. And as for speaking—it's currently reported in our London circles that Putty writes regularly for the 'Times.' He has that kind of language; and I needn't tell you, Mr Transome, that it's the apex, which, I take it, means the tip-top—and nobody can get higher than that, I think. I've belonged to a political debating society myself; I've heard a little language in my time; but when Mr Jermyn first spoke to me about having the honour to assist in your canvass of North Loamshire"—here Johnson played with his watch-seals and balanced himself a moment on his toes—"the very first thing I said was, 'And there's Garstin has got Putty! No Whig could stand against a Whig,' I said, 'who had Putty on his side: I hope Mr Transome goes in for something of a deeper colour.' I don't say that, as a general rule, opinions go for much in a return, Mr Transome; it depends on who are in the field before you, and on the skill of

your agents. But as a Radical, and a moneyed Radical, you are in a fine position, sir; and with care and judgment—with care and judgment——"

It had been impossible to interrupt Johnson before, without the most impolitic rudeness. Jermyn was not sorry that he should talk, even if he made a fool of himself; for in that solid shape, exhibiting the average amount of human foibles, he seemed less of the *alias* which Harold had insinuated him to be, and had all the additional plausibility of a lie with a circumstance.

Harold had thrown himself with contemptuous resignation into a chair, had drawn off one of his buff gloves, and was looking at his hand. But when Johnson gave his iteration with a slightly slackened pace, Harold looked up at him and broke in,

"Well then, Mr Johnson, I shall be glad if you will use your care and judgment in putting an end as well as you can to this Sproxton affair; else it may turn out an ugly business."

"Excuse me, sir, I must beg you to look at the matter a little more closely. You will see that it is impossible to take a single step backward at Sproxton. It was a matter of necessity to get the Sproxton men; else I know to a certainty

the other side would have laid hold of them first, and now I've undermined Garstin's people. They'll use their authority, and give a little shabby treating, but I've taken all the wind out of their sails. But if, by your orders, I or Mr Jermyn here were to break promise with the honest fellows, and offend Chubb the publican, what would come of it? Chubb would leave no stone unturned against you, sir; he would egg on his customers against you; the colliers and navvies would be at the nomination and at the election all the same, or rather not all the same, for they would be there against us; and instead of hustling people good-humouredly by way of a joke, and counterbalancing Debarry's cheers, they'd help to kick the cheering and the voting out of our men, and instead of being, let us say, half-a-dozen ahead of Garstin, you'd be half-a-dozen behind him, that's all. I speak plain English to you, Mr Transome, though I've the highest respect for you as a gentleman of first-rate talents and position. But, sir, to judge of these things a man must know the English voter and the English publican; and it would be a poor tale indeed"—here Mr Johnson's mouth took an expression at once bitter and pathetic—"that a gentleman like you, to say no-

thing of the good of the country, should have gone to the expense and trouble of a canvass for nothing but to find himself out of Parliament at the end of it. I've seen it again and again ; it looks bad in the cleverest man to have to sing small."

Mr Johnson's argument was not the less stringent because his idioms were vulgar. It requires a conviction and resolution amounting to heroism not to wince at phrases that class our foreshadowed endurance among those common and ignominious troubles which the world is more likely to sneer at than to pity. Harold remained a few moments in angry silence looking at the floor, with one hand on his knee, and the other on his hat, as if he were preparing to start up.

"As to undoing anything that's been done down there," said Johnson, throwing in this observation as something into the bargain, "I must wash my hands of it, sir. I couldn't work knowingly against your interest. And that young man who is just gone out,—you don't believe that he need be listened to, I hope? Chubb, the publican, hates him. Chubb would guess he was at the bottom of your having the treating stopped, and he'd set half-a-dozen of the colliers to duck him in the canal, or break his head by mistake. I'm

an experienced man, sir. I hope I've put it clear enough."

"Certainly, the exposition befits the subject," said Harold, scornfully, his dislike of the man Johnson's personality being stimulated by causes which Jermyn more than conjectured. "It's a damned, unpleasant, ravelled business that you and Mr Jermyn have knit up between you. I've no more to say."

"Then, sir, if you've no more commands, I don't wish to intrude. I shall wish you good-morning sir," said Johnson, passing out quickly.

Harold knew that he was indulging his temper, and he would probably have restrained it as a foolish move if he had thought there was great danger in it. But he was beginning to drop much of his caution and self-mastery where Jermyn was concerned, under the growing conviction that the attorney had very strong reasons for being afraid of him; reasons which would only be reinforced by any action hostile to the Transome interest. As for a sneak like this Johnson, a gentleman had to pay him, not to please him. Harold had smiles at command in the right place, but he was not going to smile when it was neither necessary nor agreeable. He was one of those

good-humoured, yet energetic men, who have the gift of anger, hatred, and scorn upon occasion, though they are too healthy and self-contented for such feelings to get generated in them without external occasion. And in relation to Jermyn the gift was coming into fine exercise.

"A—pardon me, Mr Harold," said Jermyn, speaking as soon as Johnson went out, "but I am sorry —a—you should behave disobligingly to a man who has it in his power to do much service—who, in fact, holds many threads in his hands. I admit that—a—*nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit*, as we say—a——"

"Speak for yourself," said Harold. "I don't talk in tags of Latin, which might be learned by a schoolmaster's footboy. I find the King's English express my meaning better."

"In the King's English, then," said Jermyn, who could be idiomatic enough when he was stung, "a candidate should keep his kicks till he's a member."

"O, I suppose Johnson will bear a kick if you bid him. You're his principal, I believe."

"Certainly, thus far—a—he is my London agent. But he is a man of substance, and——"

"I shall know what he is if it's necessary, I daresay. But I must jump into the carriage again.

I've no time to lose; I must go to Hawkins at the factory. Will you go?"

When Harold was gone, Jermyn's handsome face gathered blackness. He hardly ever wore his worst expression in the presence of others, and but seldom when he was alone, for he was not given to believe that any game would ultimately go against him. His luck had been good. New conditions might always turn up to give him new chances; and if affairs threatened to come to an extremity between Harold and himself, he trusted to finding some sure resource.

"He means to see to the bottom of everything if he can, that's quite plain," said Jermyn to himself. "I believe he has been getting another opinion; he has some new light about those annuities on the estate that are held in Johnson's name. He has inherited a deuced faculty for business—there's no denying that. But I shall beg leave to tell him that I've propped up the family. I don't know where they would have been without me; and if it comes to balancing, I know into which scale the gratitude ought to go. Not that he's likely to feel any—but he can feel something else; and if he makes signs of setting the dogs on me, I shall make him feel it. The people named Transome owe me a good deal more than I owe them."

In this way Mr Jermyn inwardly appealed against an unjust construction which he foresaw that his old acquaintance the Law might put on certain items in his history.

I have known persons who have been suspected of undervaluing gratitude, and excluding it from the list of virtues ; but on closer observation it has been seen that, if they have never felt grateful, it has been for want of an opportunity ; and that, far from despising gratitude, they regard it as the virtue most of all incumbent—on others towards them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

> The little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love.
>
> WORDSWORTH: *Tintern Abbey.*

JERMYN did not forget to pay his visit to the minister in Malthouse Yard that evening. The mingled irritation, dread, and defiance which he was feeling towards Harold Transome in the middle of the day, depended on too many and far-stretching causes to be dissipated by eight o'clock; but when he left Mr Lyon's house he was in a state of comparative triumph in the belief that he, and he alone, was now in possession of facts which, once grouped together, made a secret that gave him new power over Harold.

Mr Lyon, in his need for help from one who had that wisdom of the serpent which, he argued, is not forbidden, but is only of hard acquirement to dove-like innocence, had been gradually led to pour out to the attorney all the reasons which made him

desire to know the truth about the man who called himself Maurice Christian: he had shown all the precious relics, the locket, the letters, and the marriage certificate. And Jermyn had comforted him by confidently promising to ascertain, without scandal or premature betrayals, whether this man were really Annette's husband, Maurice Christian Bycliffe.

Jermyn was not rash in making this promise, since he had excellent reasons for believing that he had already come to a true conclusion on the subject. But he wished both to know a little more of this man himself, and to keep Mr Lyon in ignorance—not a difficult precaution—in an affair which it cost the minister so much pain to speak of. An easy opportunity of getting an interview with Christian was sure to offer itself before long—might even offer itself to-morrow. Jermyn had seen him more than once, though hitherto without any reason for observing him with interest; he had heard that Philip Debarry's courier was often busy in the town, and it seemed especially likely that he would be seen there when the Market was to be agitated by politics, and the new candidate was to show his paces.

The world of which Treby Magna was the centre

was naturally curious to see the young Transome, who had come from the East, was as rich as a Jew, and called himself a Radical; characteristics all equally vague in the minds of various excellent ratepayers, who drove to market in their taxed carts, or in their hereditary gigs. Places at convenient windows had been secured beforehand for a few best bonnets; but, in general, a Radical candidate excited no ardent feminine partisanship, even among the Dissenters in Treby, if they were of the prosperous and long-resident class. Some chapel-going ladies were fond of remembering that "their family had been Church;" others objected to politics altogether as having spoiled old neighbourliness, and sundered friends who had kindred views as to cowslip wine and Michaelmas cleaning; others, of the melancholy sort, said it would be well if people would think less of reforming Parliament and more of pleasing God. Irreproachable Dissenting matrons, like Mrs Muscat, whose youth had been passed in a short-waisted boddice and tight skirt, had never been animated by the struggle for liberty, and had a timid suspicion that religion was desecrated by being applied to the things of this world. Since Mr Lyon had been in Malthouse Yard there had been far too much mixing up of politics with religion;

but, at any rate, these ladies had never yet been to hear speechifying in the market-place, and they were not going to begin that practice.

Esther, however, had heard some of her feminine acquaintances say that they intended to sit at the druggist's upper window, and she was inclined to ask her father if he could think of a suitable place where she also might see and hear. Two inconsistent motives urged her. She knew that Felix cared earnestly for all public questions, and she supposed that he held it one of her deficiencies not to care about them: well, she would try to learn the secret of this ardour, which was so strong in him that it animated what she thought the dullest form of life. She was not too stupid to find it out. But this self-correcting motive was presently displaced by a motive of a different sort. It had been a pleasant variety in her monotonous days to see a man like Harold Transome, with a distinguished appearance and polished manners, and she would like to see him again: he suggested to her that brighter and more luxurious life on which her imagination dwelt without the painful effort it required to conceive the mental condition which would place her in complete sympathy with Felix Holt. It was this less unaccustomed prompting of which she was chiefly

conscious when she awaited her father's coming down to breakfast. Why, indeed, should she trouble herself so much about Felix?

Mr Lyon, more serene now that he had unbosomed his anxieties and obtained a promise of help, was already swimming so happily in the deep water of polemics in expectation of Philip Debarry's answer to his challenge, that, in the occupation of making a few notes lest certain felicitous inspirations should be wasted, he had forgotten to come down to breakfast. Esther, suspecting his abstraction, went up to his study, and found him at his desk looking up with wonder at her interruption.

"Come, father, you have forgotten your breakfast."

"It is true, child; I will come," he said, lingering to make some final strokes.

"O you naughty father!" said Esther, as he got up from his chair, "your coat-collar is twisted, your waistcoat is buttoned all wrong, and you have not brushed your hair. Sit down and let me brush it again as I did yesterday."

He sat down obediently, while Esther took a towel, which she threw over his shoulders, and then brushed the thick long fringe of soft auburn hair. This very trifling act, which she had brought herself

to for the first time yesterday, meant a great deal in Esther's little history. It had been her habit to leave the mending of her father's clothes to Lyddy; she had not liked even to touch his cloth garments; still less had it seemed a thing she would willingly undertake to correct his toilette, and use a brush for him. But having once done this, under her new sense of faulty omission, the affectionateness that was in her flowed so pleasantly, as she saw how much her father was moved by what he thought a great act of tenderness, that she quite longed to repeat it. This morning, as he sat under her hands, his face had such a calm delight in it that she could not help kissing the top of his bald head; and afterwards, when they were seated at breakfast, she said, merrily,

"Father, I shall make a *petit maître* of you by-and-by; your hair looks so pretty and silken when it is well brushed."

"Nay, child, I trust that while I would willingly depart from my evil habit of a somewhat slovenly forgetfulness in my attire, I shall never arrive at the opposite extreme. For though there is that in apparel which pleases the eye, and I deny not that your neat gown and the colour thereof—which is that of certain little flowers that spread themselves

in the hedgerows, and make a blueness there as of the sky when it is deepened in the water,—I deny not, I say, that these minor strivings after a perfection which is, as it were, an irrecoverable yet haunting memory, are a good in their proportion. Nevertheless, the brevity of our life, and the hurry and crush of the great battle with error and sin, often oblige us to an advised neglect of what is less momentous. This, I conceive, is the principle on which my friend Felix Holt acts; and I cannot but think the light comes from the true fount, though it shines through obstructions."

"You have not seen Mr Holt since Sunday, have you, father?"

"Yes; he was here yesterday. He sought Mr Transome, having a matter of some importance to speak upon with him. And I saw him afterward in the street, when he agreed that I should call for him this morning before I go into the market-place. He will have it," Mr Lyon went on, smiling, "that I must not walk about in the crowd without him to act as my special constable."

Esther felt vexed with herself that her heart was suddenly beating with unusual quickness, and that her last resolution not to trouble herself about what Felix thought, had transformed itself with magic

swiftness into mortification that he evidently avoided coming to the house when she was there, though he used to come on the slightest occasion. He knew that she was always at home until the afternoon on market days; that was the reason why he would not call for her father. Of course, it was because he attributed such littleness to her that he supposed she would retain nothing else than a feeling of offence towards him for what he had said to her. Such distrust of any good in others, such arrogance of immeasurable superiority, was extremely ungenerous. But presently she said,

"I should have liked to hear Mr Transome speak, but I suppose it is too late to get a place now."

"I am not sure; I would fain have you go if you desire it, my dear," said Mr Lyon, who could not bear to deny Esther any lawful wish. "Walk with me to Mistress Holt's, and we will learn from Felix, who will doubtless already have been out, whether he could lead you in safety to Friend Lambert's."

Esther was glad of the proposal, because, if it answered no other purpose, it would be an easy way of obliging Felix to see her, and of showing him that it was not she who cherished offence. But when, later in the morning, she was walking

towards Mrs Holt's with her father, they met Mr Jermyn, who stopped them to ask, in his most affable manner, whether Miss Lyon intended to hear the candidate, and whether she had secured a suitable place. And he ended by insisting that his daughters, who were presently coming in an open carriage, should call for her, if she would permit them. It was impossible to refuse this civility, and Esther turned back to await the carriage, pleased with the certainty of hearing and seeing, yet sorry to miss Felix. There was another day for her to think of him with unsatisfied resentment, mixed with some longings for a better understanding; and in our spring-time every day has its hidden growths in the mind, as it has in the earth when the little folded blades are getting ready to pierce the ground.

CHAPTER XIX.

Consistency?—I never changed my mind,
Which is, and always was, to live at ease.

It was only in the time of the summer fairs that the market-place had ever looked more animated than it did under that autumn mid-day sun. There were plenty of blue cockades and streamers, faces at all the windows, and a crushing buzzing crowd, urging each other backwards and forwards round the small hustings in front of the Ram Inn, which showed its more plebeian sign at right angles with the venerable Marquis of Granby. Sometimes there were scornful shouts, sometimes a rolling cascade of cheers, sometimes the shriek of a penny whistle; but above all these fitful and feeble sounds, the fine old church-tower, which looked down from above the trees on the other side of the narrow stream, sent vibrating, at every quarter, the sonorous tones of its great bell, the Good Queen Bess.

Two carriages, with blue ribbons on the harness, were conspicuous near the hustings. One was Jermyn's, filled with the brilliantly-attired daughters, accompanied by Esther, whose quieter dress helped to mark her out for attention as the most striking of the group. The other was Harold Transome's; but in this there was no lady—only the olive-skinned Dominic, whose acute yet mild face was brightened by the occupation of amusing little Harry and rescuing from his tyrannies a King Charles puppy, with big eyes, much after the pattern of the boy's.

This Trebian crowd did not count for much in the political force of the nation, but it was not the less determined as to lending or not lending its ears. No man was permitted to speak from the platform except Harold and his uncle Lingon, though, in the interval of expectation, several Liberals had come forward. Among these ill-advised persons the one whose attempt met the most emphatic resistance was Rufus Lyon. This might have been taken for resentment at the unreasonableness of the cloth, that, not content with pulpits, from whence to tyrannise over the ears of men, wishes to have the larger share of the platforms; but it was not so, for Mr Lingon

was heard with much cheering, and would have been welcomed again.

The Rector of Little Treby had been a favourite in the neighbourhood since the beginning of the century. A clergyman thoroughly unclerical in his habits had a piquancy about him which made him a sort of practical joke. He had always been called Jack Lingon, or Parson Jack—sometimes, in older and less serious days, even "Cock-fighting Jack." He swore a little when the point of a joke seemed to demand it, and was fond of wearing a coloured bandana tied loosely over his cravat, together with large brown leather leggings; he spoke in a pithy familiar way that people could understand, and had none of that frigid mincingness called dignity, which some have thought a peculiar clerical disease. In fact, he was "a charicter"—something cheerful to think of, not entirely out of connection with Sunday and sermons. And it seemed in keeping that he should have turned sharp round in politics, his opinions being only part of the excellent joke called Parson Jack. When his red eagle face and white hair were seen on the platform, the Dissenters hardly cheered this questionable Radical; but to make amends, all the Tory farmers gave him a friendly "hurray." "Let's hear what old Jack will

say for himself," was the predominant feeling among them; "he'll have something funny to say, I'll bet a penny."

It was only Lawyer Labron's young clerks and their hangers-on who were sufficiently dead to Trebian traditions to assail the parson with various sharp-edged interjections, such as broken shells, and cries of "Cock-a-doodle-doo."

"Come now, my lads," he began, in his full, pompous, yet jovial tones, thrusting his hands into the stuffed-out pockets of his greatcoat, "I'll tell you what; I'm a parson, you know; I ought to return good for evil. So here are some good nuts for you to crack in return for your shells."

There was a roar of laughter and cheering as he threw handfuls of nuts and filberts among the crowd.

"Come, now, you'll say I used to be a Tory; and some of you, whose faces I know as well as I know the head of my own crab-stick, will say that's why I'm a good fellow. But now I'll tell you something else. It's for that very reason—that I used to be a Tory, and am a good fellow—that I go along with my nephew here, who is a thoroughgoing Liberal. For will anybody here come forward and say, 'A good fellow has no need to tack about and change

his road'? No, there's not one of you such a Tom-noddy. What's good for one time is bad for another. If anybody contradicts that, ask him to eat pickled pork when he's thirsty, and to bathe in the Lapp there when the spikes of ice are shooting. And that's the reason why the men who are the best Liberals now are the very men who used to be the best Tories. There isn't a nastier horse than your horse that'll jib and back and turn round when there is but one road for him to go, and that's the road before him.

"And my nephew here — he comes of a Tory breed, you know—I'll answer for the Lingons. In the old Tory times there was never a pup belonging to a Lingon but would howl if a Whig came near him. The Lingon blood is good, rich, old Tory blood—like good rich milk—and that's why, when the right time comes, it throws up a Liberal cream. The best sort of Tory turns to the best sort of Radical. There's plenty of Radical scum—I say, beware of the scum, and look out for the cream. And here's my nephew — some of the cream, if there is any: none of your Whigs, none of your painted water that looks as if it ran, and it's standing still all the while; none of your spinning-jenny fellows. A gentleman; but up to all sorts

of business. I'm no fool myself; I'm forced to wink a good deal, for fear of seeing too much, for a neighbourly man must let himself be cheated a little. But though I've never been out of my own country, I know less about it than my nephew does. You may tell what he is, and only look at him. There's one sort of fellow sees nothing but the end of his own nose, and another sort that sees nothing but the hinder side of the moon; but my nephew Harold is of another sort; he sees everything that's at hitting distance, and he's not one to miss his mark. A good-looking man in his prime! Not a greenhorn; not a shrivelled old fellow, who'll come to speak to you and find he's left his teeth at home by mistake. Harold Transome will do you credit; if anybody says the Radicals are a set of sneaks, Brummagem halfpennies, scamps who want to play pitch and toss with the property of the country, you can say, 'Look at the member for North Loamshire!' And mind what you'll hear him say; he'll go in for making everything right—Poor-laws and Charities and Church—he wants to reform 'em all. Perhaps you'll say, 'There's that Parson Lingon talking about Church Reform—why, he belongs to the Church himself—he wants reforming too.' Well, well, wait a bit, and you'll hear by-and-by

that old Parson Lingon is reformed — shoots no more, cracks his joke no more, has drunk his last bottle: the dogs, the old pointers, will be sorry; but you'll hear that the Parson at Little Treby is a new man. That's what Church Reform is sure to come to before long. So now here are some more nuts for you, lads, and I leave you to listen to your candidate. Here he is—give him a good hurray; wave your hats, and I'll begin. Hurray!"

Harold had not been quite confident beforehand as to the good effect of his uncle's introduction; but he was soon reassured. There was no acrid partisanship among the old-fashioned Tories who mustered strong about the Marquis of Granby, and Parson Jack had put them in a good humour. Harold's only interruption came from his own party. The oratorical clerk at the Factory, acting as the tribune of the Dissenting interest, and feeling bound to put questions, might have been troublesome; but his voice being unpleasantly sharp, while Harold's was full and penetrating, the questioning was cried down. Harold's speech "did:" it was not of the glib-nonsensical sort, not ponderous, not hesitating—which is as much as to say, that it was remarkable among British speeches. Read in print the next day, perhaps it would

be neither pregnant nor conclusive, which is saying no more than that its excellence was not of an abnormal kind, but such as is usually found in the best efforts of eloquent candidates. Accordingly the applause drowned the opposition, and content predominated.

But, perhaps, the moment of most diffusive pleasure from public speaking is that in which the speech ceases and the audience can turn to commenting on it. The one speech, sometimes uttered under great responsibility as to missiles and other consequences, has given a text to twenty speakers who are under no responsibility. Even in the days of duelling a man was not challenged for being a bore, nor does this quality apparently hinder him from being much invited to dinner, which is the great index of social responsibility in a less barbarous age.

Certainly the crowd in the market-place seemed to experience this culminating enjoyment when the speaking on the platform in front of the Ram had ceased, and there were no less than three orators holding forth from the elevation of chance vehicles, not at all to the prejudice of the talking among those who were on a level with their neighbours. There was little ill-humour among the listeners, for Queen Bess was striking the last quarter before two,

and a savoury smell from the inn kitchens inspired them with an agreeable consciousness that the speakers were helping to trifle away the brief time before dinner.

Two or three of Harold's committee had lingered talking to each other on the platform, instead of re-entering; and Jermyn, after coming out to speak to one of them, had turned to the corner near which the carriages were standing, that he might tell the Transomes' coachman to drive round to the side door, and signal to his own coachman to follow. But a dialogue which was going on below induced him to pause, and, instead of giving the order, to assume the air of a careless gazer. Christian, whom the attorney had already observed looking out of a window at the Marquis of Granby, was talking to Dominic. The meeting appeared to be one of new recognition, for Christian was saying—

"You've not got grey as I have, Mr Lenoni; you're not a day older for the sixteen years. But no wonder you didn't know me; I'm bleached like a dried bone."

"Not so. It is true I was confused a meenute—I could put your face nowhere; but after that, Naples came behind it, and I said, Mr Crecstian. And so

you reside at the Manor, and I am at Transome Court."

"Ah! it's a thousand pities you're not on our side, else we might have dined together at the Marquis," said Christian. "Eh, could you manage it?" he added, languidly, knowing there was no chance of a yes.

"No—much obliged—couldn't leave the leetle boy. Ahi! Arry, Arry, pinch not poor Moro."

While Dominic was answering, Christian had stared about him, as his manner was when he was being spoken to, and had had his eyes arrested by Esther, who was leaning forward to look at Mr Harold Transome's extraordinary little gipsy of a son. But happening to meet Christian's stare, she felt annoyed, drew back, and turned away her head, colouring.

"Who are those ladies?" said Christian, in a low tone, to Dominic, as if he had been startled into a sudden wish for this information.

"They are Meester Jermyn's daughters," said Dominic, who knew nothing either of the lawyer's family or of Esther.

Christian looked puzzled a moment or two, and was silent.

"O, well—*au revoir*," he said, kissing the tips of his fingers, as the coachman, having had Jermyn's order, began to urge on the horses.

"Does he see some likeness in the girl?" thought Jermyn, as he turned away. "I wish I hadn't invited her to come in the carriage, as it happens."

CHAPTER XX.

"Good earthenware pitchers, sir!—of an excellent quaint pattern and sober colour."

THE market dinner at "the Marquis" was in high repute in Treby and its neighbourhood. The frequenters of this three-and-sixpenny ordinary liked to allude to it, as men allude to anything which implies that they move in good society, and habitually converse with those who are in the secret of the highest affairs. The guests were not only such rural residents as had driven to market, but some of the most substantial townsmen, who had always assured their wives that business required this weekly sacrifice of domestic pleasure. The poorer farmers, who put up at the Ram or the Seven Stars, where there was no fish, felt their disadvantage, bearing it modestly or bitterly, as the case might be; and although the Marquis was a Tory house, devoted to Debarry, it was too much to expect that

such tenants of the Transomes as had always been used to dine there, should consent to eat a worse dinner, and sit with worse company, because they suddenly found themselves under a Radical landlord, opposed to the political party known as Sir Maxim's. Hence the recent political divisions had not reduced the handsome length of the table at the Marquis; and the many gradations of dignity—from Mr Wace, the brewer, to the rich butcher from Leek Malton, who always modestly took the lowest seat, though without the reward of being asked to come up higher—had not been abbreviated by any secessions.

To-day there was an extra table spread for expected supernumeraries, and it was at this that Christian took his place with some of the younger farmers, who had almost a sense of dissipation in talking to a man of his questionable station and unknown experience. The provision was especially liberal, and on the whole the presence of a minority destined to vote for Transome was a ground for joking, which added to the good-humour of the chief talkers. A respectable old acquaintance turned Radical rather against his will, was rallied with even greater gusto than if his wife had had twins twice over. The best Trebian Tories were far

too sweet-blooded to turn against such old friends, and to make no distinction between them and the Radical, Dissenting, Papistical, Deistical set with whom they never dined, and probably never saw except in their imagination. But the talk was necessarily in abeyance until the more serious business of dinner was ended, and the wine, spirits, and tobacco raised mere satisfaction into beatitude.

Among the frequent though not regular guests, whom every one was glad to see, was Mr Nolan, the retired London hosier, a wiry old gentleman past seventy, whose square tight forehead, with its rigid hedge of grey hair, whose bushy eyebrows, sharp dark eyes, and remarkable hooked nose, gave a handsome distinction to his face in the midst of rural physiognomies. He had married a Miss Pendrell early in life, when he was a poor young Londoner, and the match had been thought as bad as ruin by her family; but fifteen years ago he had had the satisfaction of bringing his wife to settle amongst her own friends, and of being received with pride as a brother-in-law, retired from business, possessed of unknown thousands, and of a most agreeable talent for anecdote and conversation generally. No question had ever been raised as to

Mr Nolan's extraction on the strength of his hooked nose, or of his name being Baruch. Hebrew names "ran" in the best Saxon families; the Bible accounted for them; and no one among the uplands and hedgerows of that district was suspected of having an Oriental origin unless he carried a pedlar's jewel-box. Certainly, whatever genealogical research might have discovered, the worthy Baruch Nolan was so free from any distinctive marks of religious persuasion—he went to church with so ordinary an irregularity, and so often grumbled at the sermon—that there was no ground for classing him otherwise than with good Trebian Churchmen. He was generally regarded as a good-looking old gentleman, and a certain thin eagerness in his aspect was attributed to the life of the metropolis, where narrow space had the same sort of effect on men as on thickly-planted trees. Mr Nolan always ordered his pint of port, which, after he had sipped it a little, was wont to animate his recollections of the Royal Family, and the various ministries which had been contemporary with the successive stages of his prosperity. He was always listened to with interest: a man who had been born in the year when good old King George came to the throne—who had been

acquainted with the nude leg of the Prince Regent, and hinted at private reasons for believing that the Princess Charlotte ought not to have died—had conversational matter as special to his auditors as Marco Polo could have had on his return from Asiatic travel.

"My good sir," he said to Mr Wace, as he crossed his knees and spread his silk handkerchief over them, "Transome may be returned, or he may not be returned—that's a question for North Loamshire; but it makes little difference to the kingdom. I don't want to say things which may put younger men out of spirits, but I believe this country has seen its best days—I do indeed."

"I am sorry to hear it from one of your experience, Mr Nolan," said the brewer, a large happy-looking man. "I'd make a good fight myself before I'd leave a worse world for my boys than I've found for myself. There isn't a greater pleasure than doing a bit of planting and improving one's buildings, and investing one's money in some pretty acres of land, when it turns up here and there—land you've known from a boy. It's a nasty thought that these Radicals are to turn things round so as one can calculate on nothing. One doesn't like it for one's self, and one doesn't like it for one's neighbours.

But somehow, I believe it won't do: if we can't trust the Government just now, there's Providence and the good sense of the country; and there's a right in things—that's what I've always said—there's a right in things. The heavy end will get downmost. And if Church and King, and every man being sure of his own, are things good for this country, there's a God above will take care of 'em."

"It won't do, my dear sir," said Mr Nolan—"it won't do. When Peel and the Duke turned round about the Catholics in '29, I saw it was all over with us. We could never trust ministers any more. It was to keep off a rebellion, they said; but I say it was to keep their places. They're monstrously fond of place, both of them—that I know." Here Mr Nolan changed the crossing of his legs, and gave a deep cough, conscious of having made a point. Then he went on—"What we want is a king with a good will of his own. If we'd had that, we shouldn't have heard what we've heard to-day; Reform would never have come to this pass. When our good old King George the Third heard his ministers talking about Catholic Emancipation, he boxed their ears all round. Ah, poor soul! he did indeed, gentlemen," ended Mr Nolan, shaken by a deep laugh of admiration.

"Well, now, that's something like a king," said Mr Crowder, who was an eager listener.

"It was uncivil, though. How did they take it?" said Mr Timothy Rose, a "gentleman farmer" from Leek Malton, against whose independent position nature had provided the safeguard of a spontaneous servility. His large porcine cheeks, round twinkling eyes, and thumbs habitually twirling, expressed a concentrated effort not to get into trouble, and to speak everybody fair except when they were safely out of hearing.

"Take it! they'd be obliged to take it," said the impetuous young Joyce, a farmer of superior information. "Have you ever heard of the king's prerogative?"

"I don't say but what I have," said Rose, retreating. "I've nothing against it—nothing at all."

"No, but the Radicals have," said young Joyce, winking. "The prerogative is what they want to clip close. They want us to be governed by delegates from the trades-unions, who are to dictate to everybody, and make everything square to their mastery."

"They're a pretty set, now, those delegates," said Mr Wace, with disgust. "I once heard two of 'em spouting away. They're a sort of fellow I'd never

employ in my brewery, or anywhere else. I've seen it again and again. If a man takes to tongue-work it's all over with him. 'Everything's wrong,' says he. That's a big text. But does he want to make everything right? Not he. He'd lose his text. 'We want every man's good,' say they. Why, they never knew yet what a man's good is. How should they? It's working for his victual —not getting a slice of other people's."

"Ay, ay," said young Joyce, cordially. "I should just have liked all the delegates in the country mustered for our yeomanry to go into—that's all. They'd see where the strength of Old England lay then. You may tell what it is for a country to trust to trade when it breeds such spindling fellows as those."

"That isn't the fault of trade, my good sir," said Mr Nolan, who was often a little pained by the defects of provincial culture. "Trade, properly conducted, is good for a man's constitution. I could have shown you, in my time, weavers past seventy, with all their faculties as sharp as a penknife, doing without spectacles. It's the new system of trade that's to blame: a country can't have too much trade, if it's properly managed. Plenty of sound Tories have made their fortune by trade.

You've heard of Calibut & Co. — everybody has heard of Calibut. Well, sir, I knew old Mr Calibut as well as I know you. He was once a crony of mine in a city warehouse; and now, I'll answer for it, he has a larger rent-roll than Lord Wyvern. Bless your soul! his subscriptions to charities would make a fine income for a nobleman. And he's as good a Tory as I am. And as for his town establishment—why, how much butter do you think is consumed there annually?"

Mr Nolan paused, and then his face glowed with triumph as he answered his own question. "Why, gentlemen, not less than two thousand pounds of butter during the few months the family is in town! Trade makes property, my good sir, and property is Conservative, as they say now. Calibut's son-in-law is Lord Fortinbras. He paid me a large debt on his marriage. It's all one web, sir. The prosperity of the country is one web."

"To be sure," said Christian, who, smoking his cigar with his chair turned away from the table, was willing to make himself agreeable in the conversation. "We can't do without nobility. Look at France. When they got rid of the old nobles they were obliged to make new."

"True, very true," said Mr Nolan, who thought

Christian a little too wise for his position, but could not resist the rare gift of an instance in point. "It's the French Revolution that has done us harm here. It was the same at the end of the last century, but the war kept it off—Mr Pitt saved us. I knew Mr Pitt. I had a particular interview with him once. He joked me about getting the length of his foot. 'Mr Nolan,' said he, 'there are those on the other side of the water whose name begins with N. who would be glad to know what you know.' I was recommended to send an account of that to the newspapers after his death, poor man! but I'm not fond of that kind of show myself." Mr Nolan swung his upper leg a little, and pinched his lip between his thumb and finger, naturally pleased with his own moderation.

"No, no, very right," said Mr Wace, cordially. "But you never said a truer word than that about property. If a man's got a bit of property, a stake in the country, he'll want to keep things square. Where Jack isn't safe, Tom's in danger. But that's what makes it such an uncommonly nasty thing that a man like Transome should take up with these Radicals. It's my belief he does it only to get into Parliament; he'll turn round when he gets there. Come, Dibbs, there's something to put you in

spirits," added Mr Wace, raising his voice a little and looking at a guest lower down. "You've got to vote for a Radical with one side of your mouth, and make a wry face with the other; but he'll turn round by-and-by. As Parson Jack says, he's got the right sort of blood in him."

"I don't care two straws who I vote for," said Dibbs, sturdily. "I'm not going to make a wry face. It stands to reason a man should vote for his landlord. My farm's in good condition, and I've got the best pasture on the estate. The rot's never come nigh me. Let them grumble as are on the wrong side of the hedge."

"I wonder if Jermyn'll bring him in, though," said Mr Sircome, the great miller. "He's an uncommon fellow for carrying things through. I know he brought me through that suit about my weir; it cost a pretty penny, but he brought me through."

"It's a bit of a pill for him, too, having to turn Radical," said Mr Wace. "They say he counted on making friends with Sir Maximus, by this young one coming home and joining with Mr Philip."

"But I'll bet a penny he brings Transome in," said Mr Sircome. "Folks say he hasn't got many votes hereabout; but towards Duffield, and all there,

where the Radicals are, everybody's for him. Eh, Mr Christian? Come—you're at the fountainhead —what do they say about it now at the Manor?"

When general attention was called to Christian, young Joyce looked down at his own legs and touched the curves of his own hair, as if measuring his own approximation to that correct copy of a gentleman. Mr Wace turned his head to listen for Christian's answer with that tolerance of inferiority which becomes men in places of public resort.

"They think it will be a hard run between Transome and Garstin," said Christian. "It depends on Transome's getting plumpers."

"Well, I know I shall not split for Garstin," said Mr Wace. "It's nonsense for Debarry's voters to split for a Whig. A man's either a Tory or not a Tory."

"It seems reasonable there should be one of each side," said Mr Timothy Rose. "I don't like showing favour either way. If one side can't lower the Poor's rates and take off the Tithe, let the other try."

"But there's this in it, Wace," said Mr Sircome. "I'm not altogether against the Whigs. For they don't want to go so far as the Radicals do, and when they find they've slipped a bit too far, they'll hold on all the tighter. And the Whigs have got

the upper hand now, and it's no use fighting with the current. I run with the——"

Mr Sircome checked himself, looked furtively at Christian, and, to divert criticism, ended with—"eh, Mr Nolan?"

"There have been eminent Whigs, sir. Mr Fox was a Whig," said Mr Nolan. "Mr Fox was a great orator. He gambled a good deal. He was very intimate with the Prince of Wales. I've seen him, and the Duke of York too, go home by daylight with their hats crushed. Mr Fox was a great leader of Opposition: Government requires an Opposition. The Whigs should always be in opposition, and the Tories on the ministerial side. That's what the country used to like. 'The Whigs for salt and mustard, the Tories for meat,' Mr Gottlib the banker used to say to me. Mr Gottlib was a worthy man. When there was a great run on Gottlib's bank in '16, I saw a gentleman come in with bags of gold, and say, 'Tell Mr Gottlib there's plenty more where that came from.' It stopped the run, gentlemen—it did indeed."

This anecdote was received with great admiration, but Mr Sircome returned to the previous question.

"There now, you see, Wace—it's right there

should be Whigs as well as Tories—Pitt and Fox —I've always heard them go together."

"Well, I don't like Garstin," said the brewer. "I didn't like his conduct about the Canal Company. Of the two, I like Transome best. If a nag is to throw me, I say, let him have some blood."

"As for blood, Wace," said Mr Salt, the wool-factor, a bilious man, who only spoke when there was a good opportunity of contradicting, "ask my brother-in-law Labron a little about that. These Transomes are not the old blood."

"Well, they're the oldest that's forthcoming, I suppose," said Mr Wace, laughing. "Unless you believe in mad old Tommy Trounsem. I wonder where that old poaching fellow is now."

"I saw him half-drunk the other day," said young Joyce. "He'd got a flag-basket with hand-bills in it over his shoulder."

"I thought the old fellow was dead," said Mr Wace. "Hey! why, Jermyn," he went on merrily, as he turned round and saw the attorney entering; "you Radical! how dare you show yourself in this Tory house? Come, this is going a bit too far. We don't mind Old Harry managing our law for us —that's his proper business from time immemorial; but——"

"But—a—" said Jermyn, smiling, always ready to carry on a joke, to which his slow manner gave the piquancy of surprise, "if he meddles with politics he must be a Tory."

Jermyn was not afraid to show himself anywhere in Treby. He knew many people were not exactly fond of him, but a man can do without that, if he is prosperous. A provincial lawyer in those old-fashioned days was as independent of personal esteem as if he had been a Lord Chancellor.

There was a good-humoured laugh at this upper end of the room as Jermyn seated himself at about an equal angle between Mr Wace and Christian.

"We were talking about old Tommy Trounsem; you remember him? They say he's turned up again," said Mr Wace.

"Ah?" said Jermyn, indifferently. "But—a—Wace—I'm very busy to-day—but I wanted to see you about that bit of land of yours at the corner of Pod's End. I've had a handsome offer for you—I'm not at liberty to say from whom—but an offer that ought to tempt you."

"It won't tempt me," said Mr Wace, peremptorily; "if I've got a bit of land, I'll keep it. It's hard enough to get hereabouts."

"Then I'm to understand that you refuse all

negotiation?" said Jermyn, who had ordered a glass of sherry, and was looking round slowly as he sipped it, till his eyes seemed to rest for the first time on Christian, though he had seen him at once on entering the room.

"Unless one of the confounded railways should come. But then I'll stand out and make 'em bleed for it."

There was a murmur of approbation; the railways were a public wrong much denunciated in Treby.

"A—Mr Philip Debarry at the Manor now?" said Jermyn, suddenly questioning Christian, in a haughty tone of superiority which he often chose to use.

"No," said Christian, "he is expected to-morrow morning."

"Ah!——" Jermyn paused a moment or two, and then said, "You are sufficiently in his confidence, I think, to carry a message to him with a small document?"

"Mr Debarry has often trusted me so far," said Christian, with much coolness; "but if the business is yours, you can probably find some one you know better."

There was a little winking and grimacing among those of the company who heard this answer.

"A—true—a," said Jermyn, not showing any offence; "if you decline. But I think, if you will do me the favour to step round to my residence on your way back, and learn the business, you will prefer carrying it yourself. At my residence, if you please—not my office."

"O very well," said Christian. "I shall be very happy." Christian never allowed himself to be treated as a servant by any one but his master, and his master treated a servant more deferentially than an equal.

"Will it be five o'clock? what hour shall we say?" said Jermyn.

Christian looked at his watch and said, "About five I can be there."

"Very good," said Jermyn, finishing his sherry.

"Well—a—Wace—a—so you will hear nothing about Pod's End?"

"Not I."

"A mere pocket-handkerchief, not enough to swear by—a—" here Jermyn's face broke into a smile—"without a magnifying-glass."

"Never mind. It's mine into the bowels of the earth and up to the sky. I can build the Tower of Babel on it if I like—eh, Mr Nolan?"

"A bad investment, my good sir," said Mr Nolan,

who enjoyed a certain flavour of infidelity in this smart reply, and laughed much at it in his inward way.

"See now, how blind you Tories are," said Jermyn, rising; "if I had been your lawyer, I'd have had you make another forty-shilling freeholder with that land, and all in time for this election. But—a—the *verbum sapientibus* comes a little too late now."

Jermyn was moving away as he finished speaking, but Mr Wace called out after him, "We're not so badly off for votes as you are—good sound votes, that'll stand the Revising Barrister. Debarry at the top of the poll!"

The lawyer was already out of the doorway.

CHAPTER XXI.

'Tis grievous, that with all amplification of travel both by sea and land, a man can never separate himself from his past history.

Mr Jermyn's handsome house stood a little way out of the town, surrounded by garden and lawn and plantations of hopeful trees. As Christian approached it he was in a perfectly easy state of mind: the business he was going on was none of his, otherwise than as he was well satisfied with any opportunity of making himself valuable to Mr Philip Debarry. As he looked at Jermyn's length of wall and iron railing, he said to himself, "These lawyers are the fellows for getting on in the world with the least expense of civility. With this cursed conjuring secret of theirs called Law, they think everybody's frightened at them. My Lord Jermyn seems to have his insolence as ready as his soft sawder. He's as sleek as a rat, and has as vicious a tooth. I know the sort of vermin well enough. I've helped to fatten one or two."

In this mood of conscious, contemptuous penetration, Christian was shown by the footman into Jermyn's private room, where the attorney sat surrounded with massive oaken bookcases, and other furniture to correspond, from the thickest-legged library-table to the calendar frame and card-rack. It was the sort of room a man prepares for himself when he feels sure of a long and respectable future. He was leaning back in his leather chair, against the broad window opening on the lawn, and had just taken off his spectacles and let the newspaper fall on his knees, in despair of reading by the fading light.

When the footman opened the door and said, "Mr Christian," Jermyn said, "Good evening, Mr Christian. Be seated," pointing to a chair opposite himself and the window. "Light the candles on the shelf, John, but leave the blinds alone."

He did not speak again till the man was gone out, but appeared to be referring to a document which lay on the bureau before him. When the door was closed he drew himself up again, began to rub his hands, and turned towards his visitor, who seemed perfectly indifferent to the fact that the attorney was in shadow, and that the light fell on himself.

"A—your name—a—is Henry Scaddon."

There was a start through Christian's frame which he was quick enough, almost simultaneously, to try and disguise as a change of position. He uncrossed his legs and unbuttoned his coat. But before he had time to say anything, Jermyn went on with slow emphasis.

"You were born on the 16th of December 1782, at Blackheath. Your father was a cloth-merchant in London: he died when you were barely of age, leaving an extensive business; before you were five-and-twenty you had run through the greater part of the property, and had compromised your safety by an attempt to defraud your creditors. Subsequently you forged a cheque on your father's elder brother, who had intended to make you his heir."

Here Jermyn paused a moment and referred to the document. Christian was silent.

"In 1808 you found it expedient to leave this country in a military disguise, and were taken prisoner by the French. On the occasion of an exchange of prisoners you had the opportunity of returning to your own country, and to the bosom of your own family. You were generous enough to sacrifice that prospect in favour

of a fellow-prisoner, of about your own age and figure, who had more pressing reasons than yourself for wishing to be on this side of the water. You exchanged dress, luggage, and names with him and he passed to England instead of you as Henry Scaddon. Almost immediately afterwards you escaped from your imprisonment, after feigning an illness which prevented your exchange of names from being discovered; and it was reported that you—that is, you under the name of your fellow-prisoner—were drowned in an open boat, trying to reach a Neapolitan vessel bound for Malta. Nevertheless I have to congratulate you on the falsehood of that report, and on the certainty that you are now, after the lapse of more than twenty years, seated here in perfect safety."

Jermyn paused so long that he was evidently awaiting some answer. At last Christian replied, in a dogged tone,

"Well, sir, I've heard much longer stories than that told quite as solemnly, when there was not a word of truth in them. Suppose I deny the very peg you hang your statement on. Suppose I say I am not Henry Scaddon."

"A—in that case—a," said Jermyn, with wooden

indifference, "you would lose the advantage which —a—may attach to your possession of Henry Scaddon's knowledge. And at the same time, if it were in the least—a—inconvenient to you that you should be recognised as Henry Scaddon, your denial would not prevent me from holding the knowledge and evidence which I possess on that point; it would only prevent us from pursuing the present conversation."

"Well, sir, suppose we admit, for the sake of the conversation, that your account of the matter is the true one: what advantage have you to offer the man named Henry Scaddon?"

"The advantage — a — is problematical; but it may be considerable. It might, in fact, release you from the necessity of acting as courier, or —a—valet, or whatever other office you may occupy which prevents you from being your own master. On the other hand, my acquaintance with your secret is not necessarily a disadvantage to you. To put the matter in a nutshell, I am not inclined—a—gratuitously—to do you any harm, and I may be able to do you a considerable service."

"Which you want me to earn somehow?" said Christian. "You offer me a turn in a lottery?"

"Precisely. The matter in question is of no earthly interest to you, except—a—as it may yield you a prize. We lawyers have to do with complicated questions, and—a—legal subtleties, which are never—a—fully known even to the parties immediately interested, still less to the witnesses. Shall we agree, then, that you continue to retain two-thirds of the name which you gained by exchange, and that you oblige me by answering certain questions as to the experience of Henry Scaddon?"

"Very good. Go on."

"What articles of property, once belonging to your fellow-prisoner, Maurice Christian Bycliffe, do you still retain?"

"This ring," said Christian, twirling round the fine seal-ring on his finger, "his watch, and the little matters that hung with it, and a case of papers. I got rid of a gold snuff-box once when I was hard-up. The clothes are all gone, of course. We exchanged everything; it was all done in a hurry. Bycliffe thought we should meet again in England before long, and he was mad to get there. But that was impossible—I mean that we should meet soon after. I don't know what's become of him, else I would give him up his papers and the

watch, and so on—though, you know, it was I who did *him* the service, and he felt that."

"You were at Vesoul together before being moved to Verdun?"

"Yes."

"What else do you know about Bycliffe?"

"O, nothing very particular," said Christian, pausing, and rapping his boot with his cane. "He'd been in the Hanoverian army—a high-spirited fellow, took nothing easily; not over-strong in health. He made a fool of himself with marrying at Vesoul; and there was the devil to pay with the girl's relations; and then, when the prisoners were ordered off, they had to part. Whether they ever got together again I don't know."

"Was the marriage all right, then?"

"O, all on the square—civil marriage, church—everything. Bycliffe was a fool—a good-natured, proud, headstrong fellow."

"How long did the marriage take place before you left Vesoul?"

"About three months. I was a witness to the marriage."

"And you know no more about the wife?"

"Not afterwards. I knew her very well before—pretty Annette—Annette Ledru was her name.

She was of a good family, and they had made up a fine match for her. But she was one of your meek little diablesses, who have a will of their own once in their lives—the will to choose their own master."

"Bycliffe was not open to you about his other affairs?"

"O no—a fellow you wouldn't dare to ask a question of. People told him everything, but he told nothing in return. If Madame Annette ever found him again, she found her lord and master with a vengeance; but she was a regular lapdog. However, her family shut her up—made a prisoner of her—to prevent her running away."

"Ah—good. Much of what you have been so obliging as to say is irrelevant to any possible purpose of mine, which, in fact, has to do only with a mouldy law-case that might be aired some day. You will doubtless, on your own account, maintain perfect silence on what has passed between us, and with that condition duly preserved—a—it is possible that—a—the lottery you have put into—as you observe—may turn up a prize."

"This, then, is all the business you have with me?" said Christian, rising.

"All. You will, of course, preserve carefully all

the papers and other articles which have so many—a—recollections—a—attached to them?"

"O yes. If there's any chance of Bycliffe turning up again, I shall be sorry to have parted with the snuff-box; but I was hard-up at Naples. In fact, as you see, I was obliged at last to turn courier."

"An exceedingly agreeable life for a man of some—a—accomplishments and—a—no income," said Jermyn, rising, and reaching a candle, which he placed against his desk.

Christian knew this was a sign that he was expected to go, but he lingered standing, with one hand on the back of his chair. At last he said, rather sulkily,

"I think you're too clever, Mr Jermyn, not to perceive that I'm not a man to be made a fool of."

"Well—a—it may perhaps be a still better guarantee for you," said Jermyn, smiling, "that I see no use in attempting that—a—metamorphosis."

"The old gentleman, who ought never to have felt himself injured, is dead now, and I'm not afraid of creditors after more than twenty years."

"Certainly not;—a—there may indeed be claims which can't assert themselves—a—legally, which

yet are molesting to a man of some reputation. But you may perhaps be happily free from such fears."

Jermyn drew round his chair towards the bureau, and Christian, too acute to persevere uselessly, said, "Good-day," and left the room.

After leaning back in his chair to reflect a few minutes, Jermyn wrote the following letter:—

Dear Johnson,—I learn from your letter, received this morning, that you intend returning to town on Saturday.

While you are there, be so good as to see Medwin, who used to be with Batt & Cowley, and ascertain from him indirectly, and in the course of conversation on other topics, whether in that old business in 1810-11, *Scaddon* alias *Bycliffe, or Bycliffe* alias *Scaddon, before his imprisonment, gave Batt & Cowley any reason to believe that he was married and expected to have a child. The question, as you know, is of no practical importance; but I wish to draw up an abstract of the Bycliffe case, and the exact position in which it stood before the suit was closed by the death of the plaintiff, in order that, if Mr Harold Transome desires it, he may see how the failure of the last claim has secured the Durfey-Transome title,*

and whether there is a hair's-breadth of chance that another claim should be set up.

Of course there is not a shadow of such a chance. For even if Batt & Cowley were to suppose that they had alighted on a surviving representative of the Bycliffes, it would not enter into their heads to set up a new claim, since they brought evidence that the last life which suspended the Bycliffe remainder was extinct before the case was closed, a good twenty years ago.

Still, I want to show the present heir of the Durfey-Transomes the exact condition of the family title to the estates. So get me an answer from Medwin on the above-mentioned point.

I shall meet you at Duffield next week. We must get Transome returned. Never mind his having been a little rough the other day, but go on doing what you know is necessary for his interest. His interest is mine, which I need not say is John Johnson's.

Yours faithfully,

MATTHEW JERMYN.

When the attorney had sealed this letter and leaned back in his chair again, he was inwardly saying,

"Now, Mr Harold, I shall shut up this affair in

a private drawer till you choose to take any extreme measures which will force me to bring it out. I have the matter entirely in my own power. No one but old Lyon knows about the girl's birth. No one but Scaddon can clench the evidence about Bycliffe, and I've got Scaddon under my thumb. No soul except myself and Johnson, who is a limb of myself, knows that there is one half-dead life which may presently leave the girl a new claim to the Bycliffe heirship. I shall learn through Methurst whether Batt & Cowley knew, through Bycliffe, of this woman having come to England. I shall hold all the threads between my thumb and finger. I can use the evidence or I can nullify it.

"And so, if Mr Harold pushes me to extremity, and threatens me with Chancery and ruin, I have an opposing threat, which will either save me or turn into a punishment for him."

He rose, put out his candles, and stood with his back to the fire, looking out on the dim lawn, with its black twilight fringe of shrubs, still meditating. Quick thought was gleaming over five-and-thirty years filled with devices more or less clever, more or less desirable to be avowed. Those which might be avowed with impunity were not always to be distinguished as innocent by comparison with those

which it was advisable to conceal. In a profession where much that is noxious may be done without disgrace, is a conscience likely to be without balm when circumstances have urged a man to overstep the line where his good technical information makes him aware that (with discovery) disgrace is likely to begin?

With regard to the Transome affairs, the family had been in pressing need of money, and it had lain with him to get it for them: was it to be expected that he would not consider his own advantage where he had rendered services such as are never fully paid? If it came to a question of right and wrong instead of law, the least justifiable things he had ever done had been done on behalf of the Transomes. It had been a deucedly unpleasant thing for him to get Bycliffe arrested and thrown into prison as Henry Scaddon—perhaps hastening the man's death in that way. But if it had not been done by dint of his (Jermyn's) exertions and tact, he would like to know where the Durfey-Transomes might have been by this time. As for right or wrong, if the truth were known, the very possession of the estate by the Durfey-Transomes was owing to law-tricks that took place nearly a century ago, when the original old Durfey got his base fee.

But inward argument of this sort now, as always, was merged in anger, in exasperation, that Harold, precisely Harold Transome, should have turned out to be the probable instrument of a visitation which would be bad luck, not justice; for is there any justice where ninety-nine out of a hundred escape? He felt himself beginning to hate Harold as he had never——

Just then Jermyn's third daughter, a tall slim girl wrapped in a white woollen shawl, which she had hung over her blanketwise, skipped across the lawn towards the greenhouse to get a flower. Jermyn was startled, and did not identify the figure, or rather he identified it falsely with another tall white-wrapped figure which had sometimes set his heart beating quickly more than thirty years before. For a moment he was fully back in those distant years when he and another bright-eyed person had seen no reason why they should not indulge their passion and their vanity, and determine for themselves how their lives should be made delightful in spite of unalterable external conditions. The reasons had been unfolding themselves gradually ever since through all the years which had converted the handsome, soft-eyed, slim young Jermyn (with a touch of sentiment) into a portly lawyer of sixty,

for whom life had resolved itself into the means of keeping up his head among his professional brethren and maintaining an establishment — into a grey-haired husband and father, whose third affectionate and expensive daughter now rapped at the window and called to him, "Papa, papa, get ready for dinner; don't you remember that the Lukyns are coming?"

CHAPTER XXII.

Her gentle looks shot arrows, piercing him
As gods are pierced, with poison of sweet pity.

THE evening of the market-day had passed, and Felix had not looked in at Malthouse Yard to talk over the public events with Mr Lyon. When Esther was dressing the next morning, she had reached a point of irritated anxiety to see Felix, at which she found herself devising little schemes for attaining that end in some way that would be so elaborate as to seem perfectly natural. Her watch had a long-standing ailment of losing; possibly it wanted cleaning; Felix would tell her if it merely wanted regulating, whereas Mr Prowd might detain it unnecessarily, and cause her useless inconvenience. Or could she not get a valuable hint from Mrs Holt about the home-made bread, which was something as "sad" as Lyddy herself? Or, if she came home that way at twelve o'clock, Felix

might be going out, she might meet him, and not be obliged to call. Or—but it would be very much beneath her to take any steps of this sort. Her watch had been losing for the last two months—why should it not go on losing a little longer? She could think of no devices that were not so transparent as to be undignified. All the more undignified because Felix chose to live in a way that would prevent any one from classing him according to his education and mental refinement—"which certainly are very high," said Esther inwardly, colouring, as if in answer to some contrary allegation, "else I should not think his opinion of any consequence." But she came to the conclusion that she could not possibly call at Mrs Holt's.

It followed that up to a few minutes past twelve, when she reached the turning towards Mrs Holt's, she believed that she should go home the other way; but at the last moment there is always a reason not existing before—namely, the impossibility of further vacillation. Esther turned the corner without any visible pause, and in another minute was knocking at Mrs Holt's door, not without an inward flutter, which she was bent on disguising.

"It's never you, Miss Lyon! who'd have thought of seeing you at this time? Is the minister ill? I

thought he looked creechy. If you want help, I'll put my bonnet on."

"Don't keep Miss Lyon at the door, mother; ask her to come in," said the ringing voice of Felix, surmounting various small shufflings and babbling voices within.

"It's my wish for her to come in, I'm sure," said Mrs Holt, making way; "but what is there for her to come in to? a floor worse than any public. But step in, pray, if you're so inclined. When I've been forced to take my bit of carpet up, and have benches, I don't see why I need mind nothing no more."

"I only came to ask Mr Holt if he would look at my watch for me," said Esther, entering, and blushing a general rose-colour.

"He'll do that fast enough," said Mrs Holt, with emphasis; "that's one of the things he *will* do."

"Excuse my rising, Miss Lyon," said Felix; "I'm binding up Job's finger."

Job was a small fellow about five, with a germinal nose, large round blue eyes, and red hair that curled close to his head like the wool on the back of an infantine lamb. He had evidently been crying, and the corners of his mouth were still dolorous. Felix held him on his knee as he bound and

tied up very cleverly a tiny forefinger. There was a table in front of Felix and against the window, covered with his watchmaking implements and some open books. Two benches stood at right angles on the sanded floor, and six or seven boys of various ages up to twelve were getting their caps and preparing to go home. They huddled themselves together and stood still when Esther entered. Felix could not look up till he had finished his surgery, but he went on speaking.

"This is a hero, Miss Lyon. This is Job Tudge, a bold Briton whose finger hurts him, but who doesn't mean to cry. Good morning, boys. Don't lose your time. Get out into the air."

Esther seated herself on the end of the bench near Felix, much relieved that Job was the immediate object of attention; and the other boys rushed out behind her with a brief chant of "Good morning!"

"Did you ever see," said Mrs Holt, standing to look on, "how wonderful Felix is at that small work with his large fingers? And that's because he learnt doctoring. It isn't for want of cleverness he looks like a poor man, Miss Lyon. I've left off speaking, else I should say it's a sin and a shame."

"Mother," said Felix, who often amused himself

and kept good-humoured by giving his mother answers that were unintelligible to her, "you have an astonishing readiness in the Ciceronian antiphrasis, considering you have never studied oratory. There, Job—thou patient man—sit still if thou wilt; and now we can look at Miss Lyon."

Esther had taken off her watch and was holding it in her hand. But he looked at her face, or rather at her eyes, as he said, "You want me to doctor your watch?"

Esther's expression was appealing and timid, as it had never been before in Felix's presence; but when she saw the perfect calmness, which to her seemed coldness, of his clear grey eyes, as if he saw no reason for attaching any emphasis to this first meeting, a pang swift as an electric shock darted through her. She had been very foolish to think so much of it. It seemed to her as if her inferiority to Felix made a great gulf between them. She could not at once rally her pride and self-command, but let her glance fall on her watch, and said, rather tremulously, "It loses. It is very troublesome. It has been losing a long while."

Felix took the watch from her hand; then, looking round and seeing that his mother was gone out of the room, he said, very gently,

"You look distressed, Miss Lyon. I hope there is no trouble at home" (Felix was thinking of the minister's agitation on the previous Sunday). "But I ought perhaps to beg your pardon for saying so much."

Poor Esther was quite helpless. The mortification which had come like a bruise to all the sensibilities that had been in keen activity, insisted on some relief. Her eyes filled instantly, and a great tear rolled down while she said in a loud sort of whisper, as involuntary as her tears,

"I wanted to tell you that I was not offended—that I am not ungenerous—I thought you might think—but you have not thought of it."

Was there ever more awkward speaking?—or any behaviour less like that of the graceful, self-possessed Miss Lyon, whose phrases were usually so well turned, and whose repartees were so ready?

For a moment there was silence. Esther had her two little delicately-gloved hands clasped on the table. The next moment she felt one hand of Felix covering them both and pressing them firmly; but he did not speak. The tears were both on her cheeks now, and she could look up at him. His eyes had an expression of sadness in them, quite new to her. Suddenly little Job, who had his

mental exercises on the occasion, called out, impatiently,

"She's tut her finger!"

Felix and Esther laughed, and drew their hands away; and as Esther took her handkerchief to wipe the tears from her cheeks, she said,

"You see, Job, I am a naughty coward. I can't help crying when I've hurt myself."

"Zoo soodn't kuy," said Job, energetically, being much impressed with a moral doctrine which had come to him after a sufficient transgression of it.

"Job is like me," said Felix, "fonder of preaching than of practice. But let us look at this same watch," he went on, opening and examining it. "These little Geneva toys are cleverly constructed to go always a little wrong. But if you wind them up and set them regularly every night, you may know at least that it's not noon when the hand points there."

Felix chatted, that Esther might recover herself; but now Mrs Holt came back and apologised.

"You'll excuse my going away, I know, Miss Lyon. But there were the dumplings to see to, and what little I've got left on my hands now, I like to do well. Not but what I've more cleaning to do than ever I had in my life before, as you may tell

soon enough if you look at this floor. But when you've been used to doing things, and they've been taken away from you, it's as if your hands had been cut off, and you felt the fingers as are of no use to you."

"That's a great image, mother," said Felix, as he snapped the watch together, and handed it to Esther: "I never heard you use such an image before."

"Yes, I know you've always some fault to find with what your mother says. But if ever there was a woman could talk with the open Bible before her, and not be afraid, it's me. I never did tell stories, and I never will—though I know it's done, Miss Lyon, and by church members too, when they have candles to sell, as I could bring you the proof. But I never was one of 'em, let Felix say what he will about the printing on the tickets. His father believed it was gospel truth, and it's presumptious to say it wasn't. For as for curing, how can anybody know? There's no physic'll cure without a blessing, and *with* a blessing I know I've seen a mustard plaister work when there was no more smell nor strength in the mustard than so much flour. And reason good—for the mustard had lain in paper nobody knows how long—so I'll leave you to guess."

Mrs Holt looked hard out of the window and gave a slight inarticulate sound of scorn.

Felix had leaned back in his chair with a resigned smile, and was pinching Job's ears.

Esther said, "I think I had better go now," not knowing what else to say, yet not wishing to go immediately, lest she should seem to be running away from Mrs Holt. She felt keenly how much endurance there must be for Felix. And she had often been discontented with her father, and called him tiresome!

"Where does Job Tudge live?" she said, still sitting, and looking at the droll little figure, set off by a ragged jacket with a tail about two inches deep sticking out above the funniest of corduroys.

"Job has two mansions," said Felix. "He lives here chiefly; but he has another home, where his grandfather, Mr Tudge the stone-breaker, lives. My mother is very good to Job, Miss Lyon. She has made him a little bed in a cupboard, and she gives him sweetened porridge."

The exquisite goodness implied in these words of Felix impressed Esther the more, because in her hearing his talk had usually been pungent and denunciatory. Looking at Mrs Holt, she saw that her eyes had lost their bleak north-easterly expres-

sion, and were shining with some mildness on little Job, who had turned round towards her, propping his head against Felix.

"Well, why shouldn't I be motherly to the child, Miss Lyon?" said Mrs Holt, whose strong powers of argument required the file of an imagined contradiction, if there were no real one at hand. "I never was heard-hearted, and I never will be. It was Felix picked the child up and took to him, you may be sure, for there's nobody else master where he is; but I wasn't going to beat the orphin child and abuse him because of that, and him as straight as an arrow when he's stript, and me so fond of children, and only had one of my own to live. I'd three babies, Miss Lyon, but the blessed Lord only spared Felix, and him the masterfullest and the brownest of 'em all. But I did my duty by him, and I said, he'll have more schooling than his father, and he'll grow up a doctor, and marry a woman with money to furnish—as I was myself, spoons and everything—and I shall have the grandchildren to look up to me, and be drove out in the gig sometimes, like old Mrs Lukyn. And you see what it's all come to, Miss Lyon: here's Felix made a common man of himself, and says he'll never be married—which is the most unreasonable thing, and him never easy

but when he's got the child on his lap, or when——"

"Stop, stop, mother," Felix burst in; "pray don't use that limping argument again — that a man should marry because he's fond of children. That's a reason for not marrying. A bachelor's children are always young: they're immortal children—always lisping, waddling, helpless, and with a chance of turning out good."

"The Lord above may know what you mean! And haven't other folk's children a chance of turning out good?"

"O, they grow out of it very fast. Here's Job Tudge now," said Felix, turning the little one round on his knee, and holding his head by the back—"Job's limbs will get lanky; this little fist, that looks like a puff-ball and can hide nothing bigger than a gooseberry, will get large and bony, and perhaps want to clutch more than its share; these wide blue eyes that tell me more truth than Job knows, will narrow and narrow and try to hide truth that Job would be better without knowing; this little negative nose will become long and self-asserting; and this little tongue—put out thy tongue, Job"—Job, awe-struck under this ceremony, put out a little red tongue very timidly—"this tongue,

hardly bigger than a rose-leaf, will get large and thick, wag out of season, do mischief, brag and cant for gain or vanity, and cut as cruelly, for all its clumsiness, as if it were a sharp-edged blade. Big Job will perhaps be naughty——" As Felix, speaking with the loud emphatic distinctness habitual to him, brought out this terribly familiar word, Job's sense of mystification became too painful: he hung his lip, and began to cry.

"See there," said Mrs Holt, "you're frightening the innicent child with such talk—and it's enough to frighten them that think themselves the safest."

"Look here, Job, my man," said Felix, setting the boy down and turning him towards Esther; "go to Miss Lyon, ask her to smile at you, and that will dry up your tears like the sunshine."

Job put his two brown fists on Esther's lap, and she stooped to kiss him. Then holding his face between her hands, she said, "Tell Mr Holt we don't mean to be naughty, Job. He should believe in us more. But now I must really go home."

Esther rose and held out her hand to Mrs Holt, who kept it while she said, a little to Esther's confusion,

"I'm very glad it's took your fancy to come here sometimes, Miss Lyon. I know you're thought to

hold your head high, but I speak of people as I find 'em. And I'm sure anybody had need be humble that comes where there's a floor like this—for I've put by my best tea-trays, they're so out of all character—I must look Above for comfort now; but I don't say I'm not worthy to be called on for all that."

Felix had risen and moved towards the door that he might open it and shield Esther from more last words on his mother's part.

"Good-bye, Mr Holt."

"Will Mr Lyon like me to sit with him an hour this evening, do you think?"

"Why not? He always likes to see you."

"Then I will come. Good-bye."

"She's a very straight figure," said Mrs Holt. "How she carries herself! But I doubt there's some truth in what our people say. If she won't look at young Muscat, it's the better for *him*. He'd need have a big fortune that marries her."

"That's true, mother," said Felix, sitting down, snatching up little Job, and finding a vent for some unspeakable feeling in the pretence of worrying him.

Esther was rather melancholy as she went home, yet happier withal than she had been for many days

before. She thought, "I need not mind having shown so much anxiety about his opinion. He is too clear-sighted to mistake our mutual position; he is quite above putting a false interpretation on what I have done. Besides, he had not thought of me at all—I saw that plainly enough. Yet he was very kind. There is something greater and better in him than I had imagined. His behaviour to-day —to his mother and me too—I should call it the highest gentlemanliness, only it seems in him to be something deeper. But he has chosen an intolerable life; though I suppose, if I had a mind equal to his, and if he loved me very dearly, I should choose the same life."

Esther felt that she had prefixed an impossible "if" to that result. But now she had known Felix, her conception of what a happy love must be had become like a dissolving view, in which the once-clear images were gradually melting into new forms and new colours. The favourite Byronic heroes were beginning to look something like last night's decorations seen in the sober dawn. So fast does a little leaven spread within us—so incalculable is the effect of one personality on another. Behind all Esther's thoughts, like an unacknowledged yet constraining presence, there was the sense, that if Felix

Holt were to love her, her life would be exalted into something quite new—into a sort of difficult blessedness, such as one may imagine in beings who are conscious of painfully growing into the possession of higher powers.

It was quite true that Felix had not thought the more of Esther because of that Sunday afternoon's interview which had shaken her mind to the very roots. He had avoided intruding on Mr Lyon without special reason, because he believed the minister to be preoccupied with some private care. He had thought a great deal of Esther with a mixture of strong disapproval and strong liking, which both together made a feeling the reverse of indifference; but he was not going to let her have any influence on his life. Even if his determination had not been fixed, he would have believed that she would utterly scorn him in any other light than that of an acquaintance, and the emotion she had shown to-day did not change that belief. But he was deeply touched by this manifestation of her better qualities, and felt that there was a new tie of friendship between them. That was the brief history Felix would have given of his relation to Esther. And he was accustomed to observe himself. But very close and diligent looking at living creatures, even

through the best microscope, will leave room for new and contradictory discoveries.

Felix found Mr Lyon particularly glad to talk to him. The minister had never yet disburthened himself about his letter to Mr Philip Debarry concerning the public conference; and as by this time he had all the heads of his discussion thoroughly in his mind, it was agreeable to recite them, as well as to express his regret that time had been lost by Mr Debarry's absence from the Manor, which had prevented the immediate fulfilment of his pledge.

"I don't see how he can fulfil it if the Rector refuses," said Felix, thinking it well to moderate the little man's confidence.

"The Rector is of a spirit that will not incur earthly impeachment, and he cannot refuse what is necessary to his nephew's honourable discharge of an obligation," said Mr Lyon. "My young friend, it is a case wherein the prearranged conditions tend by such a beautiful fitness to the issue I have sought, that I should have for ever held myself a traitor to my charge had I neglected the indication."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I will not excuse you; you shall not be excused; excuses shall not be admitted; there's no excuse shall serve; you shall not be excused."—*Henry IV.*

WHEN Philip Debarry had come home that morning and read the letters which had not been forwarded to him, he laughed so heartily at Mr Lyon's that he congratulated himself on being in his private room. Otherwise his laughter would have awakened the curiosity of Sir Maximus, and Philip did not wish to tell any one the contents of the letter until he had shown them to his uncle. He determined to ride over to the Rectory to lunch; for as Lady Mary was away, he and his uncle might be *tête-à-tête.*

The Rectory was on the other side of the river, close to the church of which it was the fitting companion: a fine old brick-and-stone house, with a great bow-window opening from the library on to the deep-turfed lawn, one fat dog sleeping on the

door-stone, another fat dog waddling on the gravel, the autumn leaves duly swept away, the lingering chrysanthemums cherished, tall trees stooping or soaring in the most picturesque variety, and a Virginian creeper turning a little rustic hut into a scarlet pavilion. It was one of those rectories which are among the bulwarks of our venerable institutions—which arrest disintegrating doubt, serve as a double embankment against Popery and Dissent, and rally feminine instinct and affection to reinforce the decisions of masculine thought.

"What makes you look so merry, Phil?" said the Rector, as his nephew entered the pleasant library.

"Something that concerns you," said Philip, taking out the letter. "A clerical challenge. Here's an opportunity for you to emulate the divines of the sixteenth century and have a theological duel. Read this letter."

"What answer have you sent the crazy little fellow?" said the Rector, keeping the letter in his hand and running over it again and again, with brow knit, but eyes gleaming without any malignity.

"O, I sent no answer. I awaited yours."

"Mine!" said the Rector, throwing down the

letter on the table. "You don't suppose I'm going to hold a public debate with a schismatic of that sort? I should have an infidel shoemaker next expecting me to answer blasphemies delivered in bad grammar."

"But you see how he puts it," said Philip. With all his gravity of nature he could not resist a slightly mischievous prompting, though he had a serious feeling that he should not like to be regarded as failing to fulfil his pledge. "I think if you refuse, I shall be obliged to offer myself."

"Nonsense! Tell him he is himself acting a dishonourable part in interpreting your words as a pledge to do any preposterous thing that suits his fancy. Suppose he had asked you to give him land to build a chapel on; doubtless that would have given him a 'lively satisfaction.' A man who puts a non-natural strained sense on a promise is no better than a robber."

"But he has not asked for land. I daresay he thinks you won't object to his proposal. I confess there's a simplicity and quaintness about the letter that rather pleases me."

"Let me tell you, Phil, he's a crazy little firefly, that does a great deal of harm in my parish. He inflames the Dissenters' minds on politics. There's

no end to the mischief done by these busy prating men. They make the ignorant multitude the judges of the largest questions, both political and religious, till we shall soon have no institution left that is not on a level with the comprehension of a huckster or a drayman. There can be nothing more retrograde —losing all the results of civilisation, all the lessons of Providence—letting the windlass run down after men have been turning at it painfully for generations. If the instructed are not to judge for the uninstructed, why, let us set Dick Stubbs to make our almanacs, and have a President of the Royal Society elected by universal suffrage."

The Rector had risen, placed himself with his back to the fire, and thrust his hands in his pockets, ready to insist further on this wide argument. Philip sat nursing one leg, listening respectfully, as he always did, though often listening to the sonorous echo of his own statements, which suited his uncle's needs so exactly that he did not distinguish them from his old impressions.

"True," said Philip, "but in special cases we have to do with special conditions. You know I defend the casuists. And it may happen that, for the honour of the Church in Treby and a little also for my honour, circumstances may demand a

concession even to some notions of a Dissenting preacher."

"Not at all. I should be making a figure which my brother clergy might well take as an affront to themselves. The character of the Establishment has suffered enough already through the Evangelicals, with their extempore incoherence and their pipe-smoking piety. Look at Wimple, the man who is vicar of Shuttleton—without his gown and bands, anybody would take him for a grocer in mourning."

"Well, I shall cut a still worse figure, and so will you, in the Dissenting magazines and newspapers. It will go the round of the kingdom. There will be a paragraph headed, 'Tory Falsehood and Clerical Cowardice,' or else 'The Meanness of the Aristocracy and the Incompetence of the Beneficed Clergy.'"

"There would be a worse paragraph if I were to consent to the debate. Of course it would be said that I was beaten hollow, and that now the question had been cleared up at Treby Magna, the Church had not a sound leg to stand on. Besides," the Rector went on, frowning and smiling, "it's all very well for you to talk, Phil, but this debating is not so easy when a man's close upon sixty. What one writes or says must be something good and scholar-

ly; and after all had been done, this little Lyon would buzz about one like a wasp, and cross-question and rejoin. Let me tell you, a plain truth may be so worried and mauled by fallacies as to get the worst of it. There's no such thing as tiring a talking machine like Lyon."

"Then you absolutely refuse?"

"Yes, I do."

"You remember that when I wrote my letter of thanks to Lyon you approved my offer to serve him if possible."

"Certainly I remember it. But suppose he had asked you to vote for civil marriage, or to go and hear him preach every Sunday?"

"But he has not asked that."

"Something as unreasonable, though."

"Well," said Philip, taking up Mr Lyon's letter and looking graver—looking even vexed, "It is rather an unpleasant business for me. I really felt obliged to him. I think there's a sort of worth in the man beyond his class. Whatever may be the reason of the case, I shall disappoint him instead of doing him the service I offered."

"Well, that's a misfortune; we can't help it."

"The worst of it is, I should be insulting him to say, 'I will do anything else, but not just this that

you want.' He evidently feels himself in company with Luther and Zwingle and Calvin, and considers our letters part of the history of Protestantism."

"Yes, yes. I know it's rather an unpleasant thing, Phil. You are aware that I would have done anything in reason to prevent you from becoming unpopular here. I consider your character a possession to all of us."

"I think I must call on him forthwith, and explain and apologise."

"No, sit still; I've thought of something," said the Rector, with a sudden revival of spirits. "I've just seen Sherlock coming in. He is to lunch with me to-day. It would do no harm for him to hold the debate—a curate and a young man—he'll gain by it; and it would release you from any awkwardness, Phil. Sherlock is not going to stay here long, you know; he'll soon have his title. I'll put the thing to him. He won't object if I wish it. It's a capital idea. It will do Sherlock good. He's a clever fellow, but he wants confidence."

Philip had not time to object before Mr Sherlock appeared—a young divine of good birth and figure, of sallow complexion and bashful address.

"Sherlock, you have come in most opportunely," said the Rector. "A case has turned up in the

parish in which you can be of eminent use. I know that is what you have desired ever since you have been with me. But I'm about so much myself that there really has not been sphere enough for you. You are a studious man, I know; I daresay you have all the necessary matter prepared—at your finger-ends, if not on paper."

Mr Sherlock smiled with rather a trembling lip, willing to distinguish himself, but hoping that the Rector only alluded to a dialogue on Baptism by Aspersion, or some other pamphlet suited to the purposes of the Christian Knowledge Society. But as the Rector proceeded to unfold the circumstances under which his eminent service was to be rendered, he grew more and more nervous.

"You'll oblige me very much, Sherlock," the Rector ended, "by going into this thing zealously. Can you guess what time you will require? because it will rest with us to fix the day."

"I should be rejoiced to oblige you, Mr Debarry, but I really think I am not competent to——"

"That's your modesty, Sherlock. Don't let me hear any more of that. I know Filmore of Corpus said you might be a first-rate man if your diffidence didn't do you injustice. And you can refer anything to me, you know. Come, you will set about

the thing at once. But, Phil, you must tell the preacher to send a scheme of the debate—all the different heads—and he must agree to keep rigidly within the scheme. There, sit down at my desk and write the letter now; Thomas shall carry it."

Philip sat down to write, and the Rector, with his firm ringing voice, went on at his ease, giving "indications" to his agitated curate.

"But you can begin at once preparing a good, cogent, clear statement, and considering the probable points of assault. You can look into Jewel, Hall, Hooker, Whitgift, and the rest: you'll find them all here. My library wants nothing in English divinity. Sketch the lower ground taken by Usher and those men, but bring all your force to bear on marking out the true High-Church doctrine. Expose the wretched cavils of the Nonconformists, and the noisy futility that belongs to schismatics generally. I will give you a telling passage from Burke on the Dissenters, and some good quotations which I brought together in two sermons of my own on the Position of the English Church in Christendom. How long do you think it will take you to bring your thoughts together? You can throw them afterwards into the form of an essay; we'll have the thing printed; it will do you good with the Bishop."

With all Mr Sherlock's timidity, there was fascination for him in this distinction. He reflected that he could take coffee and sit up late, and perhaps produce something rather fine. It might be a first step towards that eminence which it was no more than his duty to aspire to. Even a polemical fame like that of a Philpotts must have had a beginning. Mr Sherlock was not insensible to the pleasure of turning sentences successfully, and it was a pleasure not always unconnected with preferment. A diffident man likes the idea of doing something remarkable, which will create belief in him without any immediate display of brilliancy. Celebrity may blush and be silent, and win a grace the more. Thus Mr Sherlock was constrained, trembling all the while, and much wishing that his essay were already in print.

"I think I could hardly be ready under a fortnight."

"Very good. Just write that, Phil, and tell him to fix the precise day and place. And then we'll go to lunch."

The Rector was quite satisfied. He had talked himself into thinking that he should like to give Sherlock a few useful hints, look up his own earlier sermons, and benefit the Curate by his criticism,

when the argument had been got into shape. He was a healthy-natured man, but that was not at all a reason why he should not have those sensibilities to the odour of authorship which belong to almost everybody who is not expected to be a writer—and especially to that form of authorship which is called suggestion, and consists in telling another man that he might do a great deal with a given subject, by bringing a sufficient amount of knowledge, reasoning, and wit to bear upon it.

Philip would have had some twinges of conscience about the Curate, if he had not guessed that the honour thrust upon him was not altogether disagreeable. The Church might perhaps have had a stronger supporter; but for himself, he had done what he was bound to do: he had done his best towards fulfilling Mr Lyon's desire.

CHAPTER XXIV.

If he come not, the play is marred.—*Midsummer Night's Dream.*

RUFUS LYON was very happy on that mild November morning appointed for the great conference in the larger room at the Free School, between himself and the Rev. Theodore Sherlock, B.A. The disappointment of not contending with the Rector in person, which had at first been bitter, had been gradually lost sight of in the positive enjoyment of an opportunity for debating on any terms. Mr Lyon had two grand elements of pleasure on such occasions: confidence in the strength of his case, and confidence in his own power of advocacy. Not—to use his own phrase—not that he "glorified himself herein;" for speech and exposition were so easy to him, that if he argued forcibly, he believed it to be simply because the truth was forcible. He was not proud of moving easily in his native medium. A panting man thinks of himself as a clever swim-

mer; but a fish swims much better, and takes his performance as a matter of course.

Whether Mr Sherlock were that panting, self-gratulating man, remained a secret. Philip Debarry, much occupied with his electioneering affairs, had only once had an opportunity of asking his uncle how Sherlock got on, and the Rector had said, curtly, "I think he'll do. I've supplied him well with references. I advise him to read only, and decline everything else as out of order. Lyon will speak to a point, and then Sherlock will read: it will be all the more telling. It will give variety." But on this particular morning peremptory business connected with the magistracy called the Rector away.

Due notice had been given, and the feminine world of Treby Magna was much more agitated by the prospect than by that of any candidate's speech. Mrs Pendrell at the Bank, Mrs Tiliot, and the Church ladies generally, felt bound to hear the Curate, who was known, apparently by an intuition concerning the nature of curates, to be a very clever young man; and he would show them what learning had to say on the right side. One or two Dissenting ladies were not without emotion at the thought that, seated on the front benches, they

should be brought near to old Church friends, and have a longer greeting than had taken place since the Catholic Emancipation. Mrs Muscat, who had been a beauty, and was as nice in her millinery as any Trebian lady belonging to the Establishment, reflected that she should put on her best large embroidered collar, and that she should ask Mrs Tiliot where it was in Duffield that she once got her bed-hangings dyed so beautifully. When Mrs Tiliot was Mary Salt, the two ladies had been bosom friends; but Mr Tiliot had looked higher and higher since his gin had become so famous; and in the year '29 he had, in Mr Muscat's hearing, spoken of Dissenters as sneaks,—a personality which could not be overlooked.

The debate was to begin at eleven, for the Rector would not allow the evening to be chosen, when low men and boys might want to be admitted out of mere mischief. This was one reason why the female part of the audience outnumbered the males. But some chief Trebians were there, even men whose means made them as independent of theory as Mr Pendrell and Mr Wace; encouraged by reflecting that they were not in a place of worship, and would not be obliged to stay longer than they chose. There was a muster of all Dis-

senters who could spare the morning time, and on the back benches were all the aged Churchwomen who shared the remnants of the sacrament wine, and who were humbly anxious to neglect nothing ecclesiastical or connected with "going to a better place."

At eleven the arrival of listeners seemed to have ceased. Mr Lyon was seated on the school tribune or daïs at his particular round table; another round table, with a chair, awaited the Curate, with whose superior position it was quite in keeping that he should not be first on the ground. A couple of extra chairs were placed farther back, and more than one important personage had been requested to act as chairman; but no Churchman would place himself in a position so equivocal as to dignity of aspect, and so unequivocal as to the obligation of sitting out the discussion; and the Rector had beforehand put a veto on any Dissenting chairman.

Mr Lyon sat patiently absorbed in his thoughts, with his notes in minute handwriting lying before him, seeming to look at the audience, but not seeing them. Every one else was contented that there should be an interval in which there could be a little neighbourly talk.

Esther was particularly happy, seated on a side-bench near her father's side of the tribune, with Felix close behind her, so that she could turn her head and talk to him. He had been very kind ever since that morning when she had called at his home, more disposed to listen indulgently to what she had to say, and less blind to her looks and movements. If he had never railed at her or ignored her, she would have been less sensitive to the attention he gave her; but as it was, the prospect of seeing him seemed to light up her life, and to disperse the old dulness. She looked unusually charming to-day, from the very fact that she was not vividly conscious of anything but of having a mind near her that asked her to be something better than she actually was. The consciousness of her own superiority amongst the people around her was superseded, and even a few brief weeks had given a softened expression to her eyes, a more feminine beseechingness and self-doubt to her manners. Perhaps, however, a little new defiance was rising in place of the old contempt — defiance of the Trebian views concerning Felix Holt.

"What a very nice-looking young woman your minister's daughter is!" said Mrs Tiliot in an undertone to Mrs Muscat, who, as she had hoped, had

found a seat next to her quondam friend—"quite the lady."

"Rather too much so, considering," said Mrs Muscat. "She's thought proud, and that's not pretty in a girl, even if there was anything to back it up. But now she seems to be encouraging that young Holt, who scoffs at everything, as you may judge by his appearance. She has despised his betters before now; but I leave you to judge whether a young man who has taken to low ways of getting his living can pay for fine cambric handkerchiefs and light kid gloves."

Mrs Muscat lowered her blond eyelashes and swayed her neat head just perceptibly from side to side, with a sincere desire to be moderate in her expressions, notwithstanding any shock that facts might have given her.

"Dear, dear," said Mrs Tiliot. "What! that is young Holt leaning forward now without a cravat? I've never seen him before to notice him, but I've heard Tiliot talking about him. They say he's a dangerous character, and goes stirring up the working men at Sproxton. And—well, to be sure, such great eyes and such a great head of hair—it is enough to frighten one. What can she see in him? Quite below her."

"Yes, and brought up a governess," said Mrs Muscat; "you'd have thought she'd know better how to choose. But the minister has let her get the upper hand sadly too much. It's a pity in a man of God—I don't deny he's *that*."

"Well, I am sorry," said Mrs Tiliot, "for I meant her to give my girls lessons when they came from school."

Mr Wace and Mr Pendrell meanwhile were standing up and looking round at the audience, nodding to their fellow-townspeople with the affability due from men in their position.

"It's time he came now," said Mr Wace, looking at his watch and comparing it with the schoolroom clock. "This debating is a newfangled sort of thing; but the Rector would never have given in to it if there hadn't been good reasons. Nolan said he wouldn't come. He says this debating is an atheistical sort of thing; the Atheists are very fond of it. Theirs is a bad book to take a leaf out of. However, we shall hear nothing but what's good from Mr Sherlock. He preaches a capital sermon—for such a young man."

"Well, it was our duty to support him—not to leave him alone among the Dissenters," said Mr Pendrell. "You see, everybody hasn't felt that.

Labron might have shown himself, if not Lukyn. I could have alleged business myself if I had thought proper."

"Here he comes, I think," said Mr Wace, turning round on hearing a movement near the small door on a level with the platform. "By George! it's Mr Debarry. Come now, this is handsome."

Mr Wace and Mr Pendrell clapped their hands, and the example was followed even by most of the Dissenters. Philip was aware that he was doing a popular thing, of a kind that Treby was not used to from the elder Debarrys; but his appearance had not been long premeditated. He was driving through the town towards an engagement at some distance, but on calling at Labron's office he had found that the affair which demanded his presence had been deferred, and so had driven round to the Free School. Christian came in behind him.

Mr Lyon was now roused from his abstraction, and, stepping from his slight elevation, begged Mr Debarry to act as moderator or president on the occasion.

"With all my heart," said Philip. "But Mr Sherlock has not arrived, apparently?"

"He tarries somewhat unduly," said Mr Lyon. "Nevertheless there may be a reason of which we

know not. Shall I collect the thoughts of the assembly by a brief introductory address in the interval?"

"No, no, no," said Mr Wace, who saw a limit to his powers of endurance. "Mr Sherlock is sure to be here in a minute or two."

"Christian," said Philip Debarry, who felt a slight misgiving, "just be so good—but stay, I'll go myself. Excuse me, gentlemen; I'll drive round to Mr Sherlock's lodgings. He may be under a little mistake as to the time. Studious men are sometimes rather absent. You needn't come with me, Christian."

As Mr Debarry went out, Rufus Lyon stepped on to the tribune again in rather an uneasy state of mind. A few ideas had occurred to him, eminently fitted to engage the audience profitably, and so to wrest some edification out of an unforeseen delay. But his native delicacy made him feel that in this assembly the Church people might fairly decline any "deliverance" on his part which exceeded the programme, and Mr Wace's negative had been energetic. But the little man suffered from imprisoned ideas, and was as restless as a racer held in. He could not sit down again, but walked backwards and forwards, stroking his chin, emitting

his low guttural interjection under the pressure of clauses and sentences which he longed to utter aloud, as he would have done in his own study. There was a low buzz in the room which helped to deepen the minister's sense that the thoughts within him were as divine messengers unheeded or rejected by a trivial generation. Many of the audience were standing; all, except the old Churchwomen on the back seats, and a few devout Dissenters who kept their eyes shut and gave their bodies a gentle oscillating motion, were interested in chat.

"Your father is uneasy," said Felix to Esther.

"Yes; and now, I think, he is feeling for his spectacles. I hope he has not left them at home: he will not be able to see anything two yards before him without them;—and it makes him so unconscious of what people expect or want."

"I'll go and ask him whether he has them," said Felix, striding over the form in front of him, and approaching Mr Lyon, whose face showed a gleam of pleasure at this relief from his abstracted isolation.

"Miss Lyon is afraid that you are at a loss for your spectacles, sir," said Felix.

"My dear young friend," said Mr Lyon, laying his hand on Felix Holt's fore-arm, which was about

on a level with the minister's shoulder, "it is a very glorious truth, albeit made somewhat painful to me by the circumstances of the present moment, that as a counterpoise to the brevity of our mortal life (wherein, as I apprehend, our powers are being trained not only for the transmission of an improved heritage, as I have heard you insist, but also for our own entrance into a higher initiation in the Divine scheme)—it is, I say, a very glorious truth, that even in what are called the waste minutes of our time, like those of expectation, the soul may soar and range, as in some of our dreams which are brief as a broken rainbow in duration, yet seem to comprise a long history of terror or of joy. And again, each moment may be a beginning of a new spiritual energy; and our pulse would doubtless be a coarse and clumsy notation of the passage from that which was not to that which is, even in the finer processes of the material world—and how much more——"

Esther was watching her father and Felix, and though she was not within hearing of what was being said, she guessed the actual state of the case —that the inquiry about the spectacles had been unheeded, and that her father was losing himself and embarrassing Felix in the intricacies of a dis-

sertation. There was not the stillness around her that would have made a movement on her part seem conspicuous, and she was impelled by her anxiety to step on the tribune and walk up to her father, who paused, a little startled.

"Pray see whether you have forgotten your spectacles, father. If so, I will go home at once and look for them."

Mr Lyon was automatically obedient to Esther, and he began immediately to feel in his pockets.

"How is it that Miss Jermyn is so friendly with the Dissenting parson?" said Christian to Quorlen, the Tory printer, who was an intimate of his. "Those grand Jermyns are not Dissenters surely?"

"*What* Miss Jermyn?"

"Why—don't you see?—that fine girl who is talking to him."

"Miss Jermyn! Why, that's the little parson's daughter."

"His daughter!" Christian gave a low brief whistle, which seemed a natural expression of surprise that "the rusty old ranter" should have a daughter of such distinguished appearance.

Meanwhile the search for the spectacles had proved vain. "'Tis a grievous fault in me, my

dear," said the little man, humbly; "I become thereby sadly burthensome to you."

"I will go at once," said Esther, refusing to let Felix go instead of her. But she had scarcely stepped off the tribune when Mr Debarry re-entered, and there was a commotion which made her wait. After a low-toned conversation with Mr Pendrell and Mr Wace, Philip Debarry stepped on to the tribune with his hat in his hand, and said, with an air of much concern and annoyance,

"I am sorry to have to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that—doubtless owing to some accidental cause which I trust will soon be explained as nothing serious—Mr Sherlock is absent from his residence, and is not to be found. He went out early, his landlady informs me, to refresh himself by a walk on this agreeable morning, as is his habit, she tells me, when he has been kept up late by study; and he has not returned. Do not let us be too anxious. I shall cause inquiry to be made in the direction of his walk. It is easy to imagine many accidents, not of a grave character, by which he might nevertheless be absolutely detained against his will. Under these circumstances, Mr Lyon," continued Philip, turning to the minister, "I presume that the debate must be adjourned."

"The debate, doubtless," began Mr Lyon; but his further speech was drowned by a general rising of the Church people from their seats, many of them feeling that, even if the cause were lamentable, the adjournment was not altogether disagreeable.

"Good gracious me!" said Mrs Tiliot, as she took her husband's arm, "I hope the poor young man hasn't fallen into the river or broken his leg."

But some of the more acrid Dissenters, whose temper was not controlled by the habits of retail business, had begun to hiss, implying that in their interpretation the Curate's absence had not depended on any injury to life or limb.

"He's turned tail, sure enough," said Mr Muscat to the neighbour behind him, lifting his eyebrows and shoulders, and laughing in a way that showed that, deacon as he was, he looked at the affair in an entirely secular light.

But Mrs Muscat thought it would be nothing but right to have all the waters dragged, agreeing in this with the majority of the Church ladies.

"I regret sincerely, Mr Lyon," said Philip Debarry, addressing the minister with politeness, "that I must say good-morning to you, with the

sense that I have not been able at present to contribute to your satisfaction as I had wished."

"Speak not of it in the way of apology, sir," said Mr Lyon, in a tone of depression. "I doubt not that you yourself have acted in good faith. Nor will I open any door of egress to constructions such as anger often deems ingenious, but which the disclosure of the simple truth may expose as erroneous and uncharitable fabrications. I wish you good-morning, sir."

When the room was cleared of the Church people, Mr Lyon wished to soothe his own spirit and that of his flock by a few reflections introductory to a parting prayer. But there was a general resistance to this effort. The men mustered round the minister, and declared their opinion that the whole thing was disgraceful to the Church. Some said the Curate's absence had been contrived from the first. Others more than hinted that it had been a folly in Mr Lyon to set on foot any procedure in common with Tories and clergymen, who, if they ever aped civility to Dissenters, would never do anything but laugh at them in their sleeves. Brother Kemp urged in his heavy bass that Mr Lyon should lose no time in sending an account of the affair to the 'Patriot;' and Brother Hawkins, in

his high tenor, observed that it was an occasion on which some stinging things might be said with all the extra effect of an *apropos*.

The position of receiving a many-voiced lecture from the members of his church was familiar to Mr Lyon; but now he felt weary, frustrated, and doubtful of his own temper. Felix, who stood by and saw that this man of sensitive fibre was suffering from talkers whose noisy superficiality cost them nothing, got exasperated. "It seems to me, sirs," he burst in, with his predominant voice, "that Mr Lyon has hitherto had the hard part of the business, while you of his congregation have had the easy one. Punish the Church clergy, if you like—they can take care of themselves. But don't punish your own minister. It's no business of mine, perhaps, except so far as fair-play is everybody's business; but it seems to me the time to ask Mr Lyon to take a little rest, instead of setting on him like so many wasps."

By this speech Felix raised a displeasure which fell on the minister as well as on himself; but he gained his immediate end. The talkers dropped off after a slight show of persistence, and Mr Lyon quitted the field of no combat with a small group of his less imperious friends, to whom he confided

his intention of committing his argument fully to paper, and forwarding it to a discriminating editor.

"But regarding personalities," he added, "I have not the same clear showing. For, say that this young man was pusillanimous—I were but ill provided with arguments if I took my stand even for a moment on so poor an irrelevancy as that because one curate is ill furnished therefore Episcopacy is false. If I held up any one to just obloquy, it would be the well-designated Incumbent of this parish, who, calling himself one of the Church militant, sends a young and weak-kneed substitute to take his place in the fight."

Mr Philip Debarry did not neglect to make industrious inquiry concerning the accidents which had detained the Rev. Theodore Sherlock on his morning walk. That well-intentioned young divine was seen no more in Treby Magna. But the river was not dragged, for by the evening coach the Rector received an explanatory letter. The Rev. Theodore's agitation had increased so much during his walk, that the passing coach had been a means of deliverance not to be resisted; and, literally at the eleventh hour, he had hailed and mounted the cheerful Tally-ho! and carried away his portion of the debate in his pocket.

But the Rector had subsequently the satisfaction of receiving Mr Sherlock's painstaking production in print, with a dedication to the Rev. Augustus Debarry, a motto from St Chrysostom, and other additions, the fruit of ripening leisure. He was "sorry for poor Sherlock, who wanted confidence;" but he was convinced that for his own part he had taken the course which under the circumstances was the least compromising to the Church. Sir Maximus, however, observed to his son and brother that he had been right and they had been wrong as to the danger of vague, enormous expressions of gratitude to a Dissenting preacher, and on any differences of opinion seldom failed to remind them of that precedent.

CHAPTER XXV.

Your fellow-man?—Divide the epithet:
Say rather, you're the fellow, he the man.

WHEN Christian quitted the Free School with the discovery that the young lady whose appearance had first startled him with an indefinable impression in the market-place was the daughter of the old Dissenting preacher who had shown so much agitated curiosity about his name, he felt very much like an uninitiated chess-player who sees that the pieces are in a peculiar position on the board, and might open the way for him to give checkmate, if he only knew how. Ever since his interview with Jermyn, his mind had been occupied with the charade it offered to his ingenuity. What was the real meaning of the lawyer's interest in him, and in his relations with Maurice Christian Bycliffe? Here was a secret; and secrets were often a source of profit, of that agreeable kind which involved little

labour. Jermyn had hinted at profit which might possibly come through him; but Christian said inwardly, with well-satisfied self-esteem, that he was not so pitiable a nincompoop as to trust Jermyn. On the contrary, the only problem before him was to find out by what combination of independent knowledge he could outwit Jermyn, elude any purchase the attorney had on him through his past history, and get a handsome bonus, by which a somewhat shattered man of pleasure might live well without a master. Christian, having early exhausted the more impulsive delights of life, had become a sober calculator; and he had made up his mind that, for a man who had long ago run through his own money, servitude in a great family was the best kind of retirement after that of a pensioner; but if a better chance offered, a person of talent must not let it slip through his fingers. He held various ends of threads, but there was danger in pulling at them too impatiently. He had not forgotten the surprise which had made him drop the punch-ladle, when Mr Crowder, talking in the steward's room, had said that a scamp named Henry Scaddon had been concerned in a lawsuit about the Transome estate. Again, Jermyn was the family lawyer of the Transomes; he knew about the ex-

change of names between Scaddon and Bycliffe; he clearly wanted to know as much as he could about Bycliffe's history. The conclusion was not remote that Bycliffe had had some claim on the Transome property, and that a difficulty had arisen from his being confounded with Henry Scaddon. But hitherto the other incident which had been apparently connected with the interchange of names —Mr Lyon's demand that he should write down the name Maurice Christian, accompanied with the question whether that were his whole name—had had no visible link with the inferences arrived at through Crowder and Jermyn.

The discovery made this morning at the Free School that Esther was the daughter of the Dissenting preacher at last suggested a possible link. Until then, Christian had not known why Esther's face had impressed him so peculiarly; but the minister's chief association for him was with Bycliffe, and that association served as a flash to show him that Esther's features and expression, and still more her bearing, now she stood and walked, revived Bycliffe's image. Daughter? There were various ways of being a daughter. Suppose this were a case of adoption: suppose Bycliffe were known to be dead, or thought to be dead. "Begad, if the old

parson had fancied the original father was come to life again, it was enough to frighten him a little. Slow and steady," Christian said to himself; "I'll get some talk with the old man again. He's safe enough: one can handle him without cutting one's self. I'll tell him I knew Bycliffe, and was his fellow-prisoner. I'll worm out the truth about this daughter. Could pretty Annette have married again, and married this little scarecrow? There's no knowing what a woman will not do."

Christian could see no distinct result for himself from his industry; but if there were to be any such result, it must be reached by following out every clue; and to the non-legal mind there are dim possibilities in law and heirship which prevent any issue from seeming too miraculous.

The consequence of these meditations was, that Christian hung about Treby more than usual in his leisure time, and that on the first opportunity he accosted Mr Lyon in the street with suitable civility, stating that since the occasion which had brought them together some weeks before he had often wished to renew their conversation, and, with Mr Lyon's permission, would now ask to do so. After being assured, as he had been by Jermyn, that this courier, who had happened by some accident to

possess the memorable locket and pocket-book, was certainly not Annette's husband, and was ignorant whether Maurice Christian Bycliffe were living or dead, the minister's mind had become easy again; his habitual lack of interest in personal details rendering him gradually oblivious of Jermyn's precautionary statement that he was pursuing inquiries, and that if anything of interest turned up, Mr Lyon should be made acquainted with it. Hence, when Christian addressed him, the minister, taken by surprise and shaken by the recollections of former anxieties, said, helplessly,

"If it is business, sir, you would perhaps do better to address yourself to Mr Jermyn."

He could not have said anything that was a more valuable hint to Christian. He inferred that the minister had made a confidant of Jermyn, and it was needful to be wary.

"On the contrary, sir," he answered, "it may be of the utmost importance to you that what passes between us should not be known to Mr Jermyn."

Mr Lyon was perplexed, and felt at once that he was no more in clear daylight concerning Jermyn than concerning Christian. He dared not neglect the possible duty of hearing what this man had to

say, and he invited him to proceed to Malthouse Yard, where they could converse in private.

Once in Mr Lyon's study, Christian opened the dialogue by saying that since he was in this room before it had occurred to him that the anxiety he had observed in Mr Lyon might be owing to some acquaintance with Maurice Christian Bycliffe—a fellow-prisoner in France whom he, Christian, had assisted in getting freed from his imprisonment, and who, in fact, had been the owner of the trifles which Mr Lyon had recently had in his possession and had restored. Christian hastened to say that he knew nothing of Bycliffe's history since they had parted in France, but that he knew of his marriage with Annette Ledru, and had been acquainted with Annette herself. He would be very glad to know what became of Bycliffe, if he could, for he liked him uncommonly.

Here Christian paused; but Mr Lyon only sat changing colour and trembling. This man's bearing and tone of mind were made repulsive to him by being brought in contact with keenly-felt memories, and he could not readily summon the courage to give answers or ask questions.

"May I ask if you knew my friend Bycliffe?" said Christian, trying a more direct method.

"No, sir; I never saw him."

"Ah! well—you have seen a very striking likeness of him. It's wonderful—unaccountable; but when I saw Miss Lyon at the Free School the other day, I could have sworn she was Bycliffe's daughter."

"Sir!" said Mr Lyon, in his deepest tone, half rising, and holding by the arms of his chair, "these subjects touch me with too sharp a point for you to be justified in thrusting them on me out of mere levity. Is there any good you seek or any injury you fear in relation to them?"

"Precisely, sir. We shall come now to an understanding. Suppose I believed that the young lady who goes by the name of Miss Lyon was the daughter of Bycliffe?"

Mr Lyon moved his lips silently.

"And suppose I had reason to suspect that there would be some great advantage for her if the law knew who was her father?"

"Sir!" said Mr Lyon, shaken out of all reticence, "I would not conceal it. She believes herself to be my daughter. But I will bear all things rather than deprive her of a right. Nevertheless I appeal to the pity of any fellow-man, not to thrust himself between her and me, but to let me disclose the truth to her myself."

"All in good time," said Christian. "We must do nothing rash. Then Miss Lyon is Annette's child?"

The minister shivered as if the edge of a knife had been drawn across his hand. But the tone of this question, by the very fact that it intensified his antipathy to Christian, enabled him to collect himself for what must be simply the endurance of a painful operation. After a moment or two he said more coolly, "It is true, sir. Her mother became my wife. Proceed with any statement which may concern my duty."

"I have no more to say than this: If there's a prize that the law might hand over to Bycliffe's daughter, I am much mistaken if there isn't a lawyer who'll take precious good care to keep the law hoodwinked. And that lawyer is Mat Jermyn. Why, my good sir, if you've been taking Jermyn into your confidence, you've been setting the fox to keep off the weasel. It strikes me that when you were made a little anxious about those articles of poor Bycliffe's, you put Jermyn on making inquiries of me. Eh? I think I am right?"

"I do not deny it."

"Ah!—it was very well you did, for by that means I've found out that he's got hold of some

secrets about Bycliffe which he means to stifle. Now, sir, if you desire any justice for your daughter, step-daughter, I should say—don't so much as wink to yourself before Jermyn; and if you've got any papers or things of that sort that may come in evidence, as these confounded rascals the lawyers call it, clutch them tight, for if they get into Jermyn's hands they may soon fly up the chimney. Have I said enough?"

"I had not purposed any further communication with Mr Jermyn, sir; indeed, I have nothing further to communicate. Except that one fact concerning my daughter's birth, which I have erred in concealing from her, I neither seek disclosures nor do I tremble before them."

"Then I have your word that you will be silent about this conversation between us? It is for your daughter's interest, mind."

"Sir, I shall be silent," said Mr Lyon, with cold gravity. "Unless," he added, with an acumen as to possibilities rather disturbing to Christian's confident contempt for the old man—"unless I were called upon by some tribunal to declare the whole truth in this relation; in which case I should submit myself to that authority of investigation which is a requisite of social order."

Christian departed, feeling satisfied that he had got the utmost to be obtained at present out of the Dissenting preacher, whom he had not dared to question more closely. He must look out for chance lights, and perhaps, too, he might catch a stray hint by stirring the sediment of Mr Crowder's memory. But he must not venture on inquiries that might be noticed. He was in awe of Jermyn.

When Mr Lyon was alone he paced up and down among his books, and thought aloud, in order to relieve himself after the constraint of this interview. "I will not wait for the urgency of necessity," he said, more than once. "I will tell the child, without compulsion. And then I shall fear nothing. And an unwonted spirit of tenderness has filled her of late. She will forgive me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Consideration like an angel came
And whipped the offending Adam out of her;
Leaving her body as a paradise
To envelop and contain celestial spirits.
SHAKSPEARE: *Henry V.*

THE next morning, after much prayer for the needful strength and wisdom, Mr Lyon came down-stairs with the resolution that another day should not pass without the fulfilment of the task he had laid on himself; but what hour he should choose for his solemn disclosure to Esther, must depend on their mutual occupations. Perhaps he must defer it till they sat up alone together, after Lyddy was gone to bed. But at breakfast Esther said,

"To-day is a holiday, father. My pupils are all going to Duffield to see the wild beasts. What have you got to do to-day? Come, you are eating no breakfast. O, Lyddy, Lyddy, the eggs are hard again. I wish you would not read Alleyne's 'Alarm' before breakfast; it makes you cry and forget the eggs."

"They *are* hard, and that's the truth; but there's hearts as are harder, Miss Esther," said Lyddy.

"I think not," said Esther. "This is leathery enough for the heart of the most obdurate Jew. Pray give it little Zachary for a football."

"Dear, dear, don't you be so light, miss. We may all be dead before night."

"You speak out of season, my good Lyddy," said Mr Lyon, wearily; "depart into the kitchen."

"What have you got to do to-day, father?" persisted Esther. "I have a holiday."

Mr Lyon felt as if this were a fresh summons not to delay. "I have something of great moment to do, my dear; and since you are not otherwise demanded, I will ask you to come and sit with me up-stairs."

Esther wondered what there could be on her father's mind more pressing than his morning studies.

She soon knew. Motionless, but mentally stirred as she had never been before, Esther listened to her mother's story, and to the outpouring of her step-father's long-pent-up experience. The rays of the morning sun which fell athwart the books, the sense of the beginning day, had deepened the solemnity more than night would have done. All know-

ledge which alters our lives penetrates us more when it comes in the early morning: the day that has to be travelled with something new and perhaps for ever sad in its light, is an image of the life that spreads beyond. But at night the time of rest is near.

Mr Lyon regarded his narrative as a confession—as a revelation to this beloved child of his own miserable weakness and error. But to her it seemed a revelation of another sort: her mind seemed suddenly enlarged by a vision of passion and struggle, of delight and renunciation, in the lot of beings who had hitherto been a dull enigma to her. And in the act of unfolding to her that he was not her real father, but had only striven to cherish her as a father, had only longed to be loved as a father, the odd, wayworn, unworldly man became the object of a new sympathy in which Esther felt herself exalted. Perhaps this knowledge would have been less powerful within her, but for the mental preparation that had come during the last two months from her acquaintance with Felix Holt, which had taught her to doubt the infallibility of her own standard, and raised a presentiment of moral depths that were hidden from her.

Esther had taken her place opposite to her

father, and had not moved even her clasped hands while he was speaking. But after the long outpouring in which he seemed to lose the sense of everything but the memories he was giving utterance to, he paused a little while and then said timidly,

"This is a late retrieval of a long error, Esther. I make not excuses for myself, for we ought to strive that our affections be rooted in the truth. Nevertheless you——"

Esther had risen, and had glided on to the wooden stool on a level with her father's chair, where he was accustomed to lay books. She wanted to speak, but the floodgates could not be opened for words alone. She threw her arms round the old man's neck and sobbed out with a passionate cry, "Father, father! forgive me if I have not loved you enough. I will—I will!"

The old man's little delicate frame was shaken by a surprise and joy that were almost painful in their intensity. He had been going to ask forgiveness of her who asked it for herself. In that moment of supreme complex emotion one ray of the minister's joy was the thought, "Surely the work of grace is begun in her—surely here is a heart that the Lord hath touched."

They sat so, enclasped in silence, while Esther relieved her full heart. When she raised her head, she sat quite still for a minute or two looking fixedly before her, and keeping one little hand in the minister's. Presently she looked at him and said,

"Then you lived like a working man, father; you were very, very poor. Yet my mother had been used to luxury. She was well born—she was a lady."

"It is true, my dear; it was a poor life that I could give her."

Mr Lyon answered in utter dimness as to the course Esther's mind was taking. He had anticipated before his disclosure, from his long-standing discernment of tendencies in her which were often the cause of silent grief to him, that the discovery likely to have the keenest interest for her would be that her parents had a higher rank than that of the poor Dissenting preacher; but she had shown that other and better sensibilities were predominant. He rebuked himself now for a hasty and shallow judgment concerning the child's inner life, and waited for new clearness.

"But that must be the best life, father," said Esther, suddenly rising, with a flush across her paleness, and standing with her head thrown a little

backward, as if some illumination had given her a new decision. "That must be the best life."

"What life, my dear child?"

"Why, that where one bears and does everything because of some great and strong feeling—so that this and that in one's circumstances don't signify."

"Yea, verily; but the feeling that should be thus supreme is devotedness to the Divine Will."

Esther did not speak; her father's words did not fit on to the impressions wrought in her by what he had told her. She sat down again, and said, more quietly,

"Mamma did not speak much of my—first father?"

"Not much, dear. She said he was beautiful to the eye, and good and generous; and that his family was of those who have been long privileged among their fellows. But now I will deliver to you the letters, which, together with a ring and locket, are the only visible memorials she retained of him."

Mr Lyon reached and delivered to Esther the box containing the relics. "Take them, and examine them in privacy, my dear. And that I may no more err by concealment, I will tell you some late occurrences that bear on these memorials, though

to my present apprehension doubtfully and confusedly."

He then narrated to Esther all that had passed between himself and Christian. The possibility—to which Mr Lyon's alarms had pointed—that her real father might still be living, was a new shock. She could not speak about it to her present father, but it was registered in silence as a painful addition to the uncertainties which she suddenly saw hanging over her life.

"I have little confidence in this man's allegations," Mr Lyon ended. "I confess his presence and speech are to me as the jarring of metal. He bears the stamp of one who has never conceived aught of more sanctity than the lust of the eye and the pride of life. He hints at some possible inheritance for you, and denounces mysteriously the devices of Mr Jermyn. All this may or may not have a true foundation. But it is not my part to move in this matter save on a clearer showing."

"Certainly not, father," said Esther, eagerly. A little while ago, these problematic prospects might have set her dreaming pleasantly; but now, for some reasons that she could not have put distinctly into words, they affected her with dread.

CHAPTER XXVII.

To hear with eyes is part of love's rare wit.
SHAKSPEARE: *Sonnets.*

Custom calls me to't:—
What custom wills, in all things should we do't?
The dust on antique time would lie unswept,
And mountainous error be too highly heaped
For truth to over-peer.—*Coriolanus.*

IN the afternoon Mr Lyon went out to see the sick amongst his flock, and Esther, who had been passing the morning in dwelling on the memories and the few remaining relics of her parents, was left alone in the parlour amidst the lingering odours of the early dinner, not easily got rid of in that small house. Rich people, who know nothing of these vulgar details, can hardly imagine their significance in the history of multitudes of human lives in which the sensibilities are never adjusted to the external conditions. Esther always felt so much discomfort from those odours that she usually seized any possibility of escaping from them, and to-day they oppressed her the more because she was

weary with long-continued agitation. Why did she not put on her bonnet as usual and get out into the open air? It was one of those pleasant November afternoons—pleasant in the wide country—when the sunshine is on the clinging brown leaves of the young oaks, and the last yellow leaves of the elms flutter down in the fresh but not eager breeze. But Esther sat still on the sofa—pale and with reddened eyelids, her curls all pushed back carelessly, and her elbow resting on the ridgy black horsehair, which usually almost set her teeth on edge if she pressed it even through her sleeve—while her eyes rested blankly on the dull street. Lyddy had said, "Miss, you look sadly; if you can't take a walk, go and lie down." She had never seen the curls in such disorder, and she reflected that there had been a death from typhus recently. But the obstinate Miss only shook her head.

Esther was waiting for the sake of—not a probability, but—a mere possibility, which made the brothy odours endurable. Apparently, in less than half an hour, the possibility came to pass, for she changed her attitude, almost started from her seat, sat down again, and listened eagerly. If Lyddy should send him away, could she herself rush out and call him back? Why not? Such things were

permissible where it was understood, from the necessity of the case, that there was only friendship. But Lyddy opened the door and said, "Here's Mr Holt, miss, wants to know if you'll give him leave to come in. I told him you was sadly."

"O yes, Lyddy, beg him to come in."

"I should not have persevered," said Felix, as they shook hands, "only I know Lyddy's dismal way. But you do look ill," he went on, as he seated himself at the other end of the sofa. "Or rather—for that's a false way of putting it—you look as if you had been very much distressed. Do you mind about my taking notice of it?"

He spoke very kindly, and looked at her more persistently than he had ever done before, when her hair was perfect.

"You are quite right. I am not at all ill. But I have been very much agitated this morning. My father has been telling me things I never heard before about my mother, and giving me things that belonged to her. She died when I was a very little creature."

"Then it is no new pain or trouble for you and Mr Lyon? I could not help being anxious to know that."

Esther passed her hand over her brow before she

answered. "I hardly know whether it is pain, or something better than pleasure. It has made me see things I was blind to before—depths in my father's nature."

As she said this, she looked at Felix, and their eyes met very gravely.

"It is such a beautiful day," he said, "it would do you good to go into the air. Let me take you along the river towards Little Treby, will you?"

"I will put my bonnet on," said Esther, unhesitatingly, though they had never walked out together before.

It is true that to get into the fields they had to pass through the street; and when Esther saw some acquaintances, she reflected that her walking alone with Felix might be a subject of remark—all the more because of his cap, patched boots, no cravat, and thick stick. Esther was a little amazed herself at what she had come to. So our lives glide on: the river ends we don't know where, and the sea begins, and then there is no more jumping ashore.

When they were in the streets Esther hardly spoke. Felix talked with his usual readiness, as easily as if he were not doing it solely to divert her thoughts, first about Job Tudge's delicate chest,

and the probability that the little white-faced monkey would not live long; and then about a miserable beginning of a night-school, which was all he could get together at Sproxton; and the dismalness of that hamlet, which was a sort of lip to the coalpit on one side and the "public" on the other—and yet a paradise compared with the wynds of Glasgow, where there was little more than a chink of daylight to show the hatred in women's faces.

But soon they got into the fields, where there was a right of way towards Little Treby, now following the course of the river, now crossing towards a lane, and now turning into a cart-track through a plantation.

"Here we are!" said Felix, when they had crossed the wooden bridge, and were treading on the slanting shadows made by the elm trunks. "I think this is delicious. I never feel less unhappy than in these late autumn afternoons when they are sunny."

"Less unhappy! There now!" said Esther, smiling at him with some of her habitual sauciness, "I have caught you in self-contradiction. I have heard you quite furious against puling, melancholy people. If I had said what you have just

said, you would have given me a long lecture, and told me to go home and interest myself in the reason of the rule of three."

"Very likely," said Felix, beating the weeds, according to the foible of our common humanity when it has a stick in its hand. "But I don't think myself a fine fellow because I'm melancholy. I don't measure my force by the negations in me, and think my soul must be a mighty one because it is more given to idle suffering than to beneficent activity. That's what your favourite gentlemen do, of the Byronic-bilious style."

"I don't admit that those are my favourite gentlemen."

"I've heard you defend them—gentlemen like your Rénés, who have no particular talent for the finite, but a general sense that the infinite is the right thing for them. They might as well boast of nausea as a proof of a strong inside."

"Stop, stop! You run on in that way to get out of my reach. I convicted you of confessing that you are melancholy."

"Yes!" said Felix, thrusting his left hand into his pocket, with a shrug; "as I could confess to a great many other things I'm not proud of. The fact is, there are not many easy lots to be drawn in the

world at present; and such as they are I am not envious of them. I don't say life is not worth having: it is worth having to a man who has some sparks of sense and feeling and bravery in him. And the finest fellow of all would be the one who could be glad to have lived because the world was chiefly miserable, and his life had come to help some one who needed it. He would be the man who had the most powers and the fewest selfish wants. But I'm not up to the level of what I see to be best. I'm often a hungry discontented fellow."

"Why have you made your life so hard then?" said Esther, rather frightened as she asked the question. "It seems to me you have tried to find just the most difficult task."

"Not at all," said Felix, with curt decision. "My course was a very simple one. It was pointed out to me by conditions that I saw as clearly as I see the bars of this stile. It's a difficult stile too," added Felix, striding over. "Shall I help you, or will you be left to yourself?"

"I can do without help, thank you."

"It was all simple enough," continued Felix, as they walked on. "If I meant to put a stop to the sale of those drugs, I must keep my mother, and of course at her age she would not leave the place she

had been used to. And I had made up my mind against what they call genteel businesses."

"But suppose every one did as you do? Please to forgive me for saying so; but I cannot see why you could not have lived as honourably with some employment that presupposes education and refinement."

"Because you can't see my history or my nature," said Felix, bluntly. "I have to determine for myself, and not for other men. I don't blame them, or think I am better than they; their circumstances are different. I would never choose to withdraw myself from the labour and common burthen of the world; but I do choose to withdraw myself from the push and the scramble for money and position. Any man is at liberty to call me a fool, and say that mankind are benefited by the push and the scramble in the long-run. But I care for the people who live now and will not be living when the long-run comes. As it is, I prefer going shares with the unlucky."

Esther did not speak, and there was silence between them for a minute or two, till they passed through a gate into a plantation where there was no large timber, but only thin-stemmed trees and underwood, so that the sunlight fell on the mossy spaces which lay open here and there.

"See how beautiful those stooping birch-stems are with the light on them!" said Felix. "Here is an old felled trunk they have not thought worth carrying away. Shall we sit down a little while?"

"Yes, the mossy ground with the dry leaves sprinkled over it is delightful to one's feet." Esther sat down and took off her bonnet, that the light breeze might fall on her head. Felix, too, threw down his cap and stick, lying on the ground with his back against the felled trunk.

"I wish I felt more as you do," she said, looking at the point of her foot, which was playing with a tuft of moss. "I can't help caring very much what happens to me. And you seem to care so little about yourself."

"You are thoroughly mistaken," said Felix. "It is just because I'm a very ambitious fellow, with very hungry passions, wanting a great deal to satisfy me, that I have chosen to give up what people call worldly good. At least that has been one determining reason. It all depends on what a man gets into his consciousness—what life thrusts into his mind, so that it becomes present to him as remorse is present to the guilty, or a mechanical problem to an inventive genius. There are two things I've got present in that way: one of them is the picture of

what I should hate to be. I'm determined never to go about making my face simpering or solemn, and telling professional lies for profit; or to get tangled in affairs where I must wink at dishonesty and pocket the proceeds, and justify that knavery as part of a system that I can't alter. If I once went into that sort of struggle for success, I should want to win—I should defend the wrong that I had once identified myself with. I should become everything that I see now beforehand to be detestable. And what's more, I should do this, as men are doing it every day, for a ridiculously small prize—perhaps for none at all—perhaps for the sake of two parlours, a rank eligible for the churchwardenship, a discontented wife and several unhopeful children."

Esther felt a terrible pressure on her heart—the certainty of her remoteness from Felix—the sense that she was utterly trivial to him.

"The other thing that's got into my mind like a splinter," said Felix, after a pause, "is the life of the miserable—the spawning life of vice and hunger. I'll never be one of the sleek dogs. The old Catholics are right, with their higher rule and their lower. Some are called to subject themselves to a harder discipline, and renounce things voluntarily which

are lawful for others. It is the old word—'necessity is laid upon me.'"

"It seems to me you are stricter than my father is."

"No! I quarrel with no delight that is not base or cruel, but one must sometimes accommodate one's self to a small share. That is the lot of the majority. I would wish the minority joy, only they don't want my wishes."

Again there was silence. Esther's cheeks were hot in spite of the breeze that sent her hair floating backward. She felt an inward strain, a demand on her to see things in a light that was not easy or soothing. When Felix had asked her to walk, he had seemed so kind, so alive to what might be her feelings, that she had thought herself nearer to him than she had ever been before; but since they had come out, he had appeared to forget all that. And yet she was conscious that this impatience of hers was very petty. Battling in this way with her own little impulses, and looking at the birch-stems opposite till her gaze was too wide for her to see anything distinctly, she was unaware how long they had remained without speaking. She did not know that Felix had changed his attitude a little, and was resting his elbow on the tree-trunk, while he sup-

ported his head, which was turned towards her. Suddenly he said, in a lower tone than was habitual to him,

"You are very beautiful."

She started and looked round at him, to see whether his face would give some help to the interpretation of this novel speech. He was looking up at her quite calmly, very much as a reverential Protestant might look at a picture of the Virgin, with a devoutness suggested by the type rather than by the image. Esther's vanity was not in the least gratified: she felt that, somehow or other, Felix was going to reproach her.

"I wonder," he went on, still looking at her, "whether the subtle measuring of forces will ever come to measuring the force there would be in one beautiful woman whose mind was as noble as her face was beautiful—who made a man's passion for her rush in one current with all the great aims of his life."

Esther's eyes got hot and smarting. It was no use trying to be dignified. She had turned away her head, and now said, rather bitterly, "It is difficult for a woman ever to try to be anything good when she is not believed in—when it is always supposed that she must be contemptible."

"No, dear Esther"—it was the first time Felix had been prompted to call her by her Christian name, and as he did so he laid his large hand on her two little hands, which were clasped on her knees. "You don't believe that I think you contemptible. When I first saw you——"

"I know, I know," said Esther, interrupting him impetuously, but still looking away. "You mean you did think me contemptible then. But it was very narrow of you to judge me in that way, when my life had been so different from yours. I have great faults. I know I am selfish, and think too much of my own small tastes and too little of what affects others. But I am not stupid. I am not unfeeling. I can see what is better."

"But I have not done you injustice since I knew more of you," said Felix, gently.

"Yes, you have," said Esther, turning and smiling at him through her tears. "You talk to me like an angry pedagogue. Were *you* always wise? Remember the time when you were foolish or naughty."

"That is not far off," said Felix, curtly, taking away his hand and clasping it with the other at the back of his head. The talk, which seemed to be introducing a mutual understanding, such as had

not existed before, seemed to have undergone some check.

"Shall we get up and walk back now?" said Esther, after a few moments.

"No," said Felix, entreatingly. "Don't move yet. I daresay we shall never walk together or sit here again."

"Why not?"

"Because I am a man who am warned by visions. Those old stories of visions and dreams guiding men have their truth: we are saved by making the future present to ourselves."

"I wish I could get visions, then," said Esther, smiling at him, with an effort at playfulness, in resistance to something vaguely mournful within her.

"That is what I want," said Felix, looking at her very earnestly. "Don't turn your head. Do look at me, and then I shall know if I may go on speaking. I do believe in you; but I want you to have such a vision of the future that you may never lose your best self. Some charm or other may be flung about you—some of your atta-of-rose fascinations—and nothing but a good strong terrible vision will save you. And if it did save you, you might be that woman I was thinking of a little while ago when I

looked at your face: the woman whose beauty makes a great task easier to men instead of turning them away from it. I am not likely to see such fine issues; but they may come where a woman's spirit is finely touched. I should like to be sure they would come to you."

"Why are you not likely to know what becomes of me?" said Esther, turning away her eyes in spite of his command. "Why should you not always be my father's friend and mine?"

"O, I shall go away as soon as I can to some large town," said Felix, in his more usual tone,— "some ugly, wicked, miserable place. I want to be a demagogue of a new sort; an honest one, if possible, who will tell the people they are blind and foolish, and neither flatter them nor fatten on them. I have my heritage—an order I belong to. I have the blood of a line of handicraftsmen in my veins, and I want to stand up for the lot of the handicraftsman as a good lot, in which a man may be better trained to all the best functions of his nature than if he belonged to the grimacing set who have visiting-cards, and are proud to be thought richer than their neighbours."

"Would nothing ever make it seem right to you to change your mind?" said Esther (she had rapidly

woven some possibilities out of the new uncertainties in her own lot, though she would not for the world have had Felix know of her weaving). "Suppose, by some means or other, a fortune might come to you honourably—by marriage, or in any other unexpected way—would you see no change in your course?"

"No," said Felix, peremptorily; "I will never be rich. I don't count that as any peculiar virtue. Some men do well to accept riches, but that is not my inward vocation: I have no fellow-feeling with the rich as a class; the habits of their lives are odious to me. Thousands of men have wedded poverty because they expect to go to heaven for it; I don't expect to go to heaven for it, but I wed it because it enables me to do what I most want to do on earth. Whatever the hopes for the world may be—whether great or small—I am a man of this generation; I will try to make life less bitter for a few within my reach. It is held reasonable enough to toil for the fortunes of a family, though it may turn to imbecility in the third generation. I choose a family with more chances in it."

Esther looked before her dreamily till she said, "That seems a hard lot; yet it is a great one." She rose to walk back.

"Then you don't think I'm a fool," said Felix, loudly, starting to his feet, and then stooping to gather up his cap and stick.

"Of course you suspected me of that stupidity."

"Well—women, unless they are Saint Theresas or Elizabeth Frys, generally think this sort of thing madness, unless when they read of it in the Bible."

"A woman can hardly ever choose in that way; she is dependent on what happens to her. She must take meaner things, because only meaner things are within her reach."

"Why, can you imagine yourself choosing hardship as the better lot?" said Felix, looking at her with a sudden question in his eyes.

"Yes, I can," she said, flushing over neck and brow.

Their words were charged with a meaning dependent entirely on the secret consciousness of each. Nothing had been said which was necessarily personal. They walked a few yards along the road by which they had come, without further speech, till Felix said gently, "Take my arm." She took it, and they walked home so, entirely without conversation. Felix was struggling as a firm man struggles with a temptation, seeing beyond it and disbelieving its lying promise. Esther was struggling as a

woman struggles with the yearning for some expression of love, and with vexation under that subjection to a yearning which is not likely to be satisfied. Each was conscious of a silence which each was unable to break, till they entered Malthouse Lane, and were within a few yards of the minister's door.

"It is getting dusk," Felix then said; "will Mr Lyon be anxious about you?"

"No, I think not. Lyddy would tell him that I went out with you, and that you carried a large stick," said Esther, with her light laugh.

Felix went in with Esther to take tea, but the conversation was entirely between him and Mr Lyon about the tricks of canvassing, the foolish personality of the placards, and the probabilities of Transome's return, as to which Felix declared himself to have become indifferent. This scepticism made the minister uneasy: he had great belief in the old political watchwords, had preached that universal suffrage and no ballot were agreeable to the will of God, and liked to believe that a visible "instrument" was forthcoming in the Radical Candidate who had pronounced emphatically against Whig finality. Felix, being in a perverse mood, contended that universal suffrage would be

equally agreeable to the devil; that he would change his politics a little, have a larger traffic, and see himself more fully represented in Parliament.

"Nay, my friend," said the minister, "you are again sporting with paradox; for you will not deny that you glory in the name of Radical, or Root-and-branch man, as they said in the great times when Nonconformity was in its giant youth."

"A Radical—yes; but I want to go to some roots a good deal lower down than the franchise."

"Truly there is a work within which cannot be dispensed with; but it is our preliminary work to free men from the stifled life of political nullity, and bring them into what Milton calls 'the liberal air,' wherein alone can be wrought the final triumphs of the Spirit."

"With all my heart. But while Caliban is Caliban, though you multiply him by a million, he'll worship every Trinculo that carries a bottle. I forget, though — you don't read Shakspeare, Mr Lyon."

"I am bound to confess that I have so far looked into a volume of Esther's as to conceive your meaning; but the fantasies therein were so little to be reconciled with a steady contemplation of that

divine economy which is hidden from sense and revealed to faith, that I forbore the reading, as likely to perturb my ministrations."

Esther sat by in unusual silence. The conviction that Felix willed her exclusion from his life was making it plain that something more than friendship between them was not so thoroughly out of the question as she had always inwardly asserted. In her pain that his choice lay aloof from her, she was compelled frankly to admit to herself the longing that it had been otherwise, and that he had entreated her to share his difficult life. He was like no one else to her: he had seemed to bring at once a law, and the love that gave strength to obey the law. Yet the next moment, stung by his independence of her, she denied that she loved him; she had only longed for a moral support under the negations of her life. If she were not to have that support, all effort seemed useless.

Esther had been so long used to hear the formulas of her father's belief without feeling or understanding them, that they had lost all power to touch her. The first religious experience of her life—the first self-questioning, the first voluntary subjection, the first longing to acquire the strength of greater motives and obey the more strenuous rule—had

come to her through Felix Holt. No wonder that she felt as if the loss of him were inevitable backsliding.

But was it certain that she should lose him? She did not believe that he was really indifferent to her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Titus. But what says Jupiter, I ask thee?
Clown. Alas, sir, I know not Jupiter:
I never drank with him in all my life.
Titus Andronicus.

THE multiplication of uncomplimentary placards noticed by Mr Lyon and Felix Holt was one of several signs that the days of nomination and election were approaching. The presence of the Revising Barrister in Treby was not only an opportunity for all persons not otherwise busy to show their zeal for the purification of the voting-lists, but also to reconcile private ease and public duty by standing about the streets and lounging at doors.

It was no light business for Trebians to form an opinion; the mere fact of a public functionary with an unfamiliar title was enough to give them pause, as a premiss that was not to be quickly started from. To Mr Pink the saddler, for example, until some distinct injury or benefit had accrued to him,

the existence of the Revising Barrister was like the existence of the young giraffe which Wombwell had lately brought into those parts—it was to be contemplated, and not criticised. Mr Pink professed a deep-dyed Toryism; but he regarded all fault-finding as Radical and somewhat impious, as disturbing to trade, and likely to offend the gentry or the servants through whom their harness was ordered: there was a Nemesis in things which made objection unsafe, and even the Reform Bill was a sort of electric eel which a thriving tradesman had better leave alone. It was only the "Papists" who lived far enough off to be spoken of uncivilly.

But Mr Pink was fond of news, which he collected and retailed with perfect impartiality, noting facts and rejecting comments. Hence he was well pleased to have his shop so constant a place of resort for loungers, that to many Trebians there was a strong association between the pleasures of gossip and the smell of leather. He had the satisfaction of chalking and cutting, and of keeping his journeymen close at work, at the very time that he learned from his visitors who were those whose votes had been called in question before His Honour, how Lawyer Jermyn had been too much for Lawyer Labron about Todd's cottages, and how, in the

opinion of some townsmen, this looking into the value of people's property, and swearing it down below a certain sum, was a nasty, inquisitorial kind of thing; while others observed that being nice to a few pounds was all nonsense—they should put the figure high enough, and then never mind if a voter's qualification was thereabouts. But, said Mr Sims the auctioneer, everything was done for the sake of the lawyers. Mr Pink suggested impartially that lawyers must live; but Mr Sims, having a ready auctioneering wit, did not see that so many of them need live, or that babies were born lawyers. Mr Pink felt that this speculation was complicated by the ordering of side-saddles for lawyers' daughters, and, returning to the firm ground of fact, stated that it was getting dusk.

The dusk seemed deepened the next moment by a tall figure obstructing the doorway, at sight of whom Mr Pink rubbed his hands and smiled and bowed more than once, with evident solicitude to show honour where honour was due, while he said,

"Mr Christian, sir, how do you do, sir?"

Christian answered with the condescending familiarity of a superior. "Very badly, I can tell you, with these confounded braces that you were to make such a fine job of. See, old fellow, they've burst out again."

"Very sorry, sir. Can you leave them with me?"

"O yes, I'll leave them. What's the news, eh?" said Christian, half seating himself on a high stool, and beating his boot with a hand-whip.

"Well, sir, we look to you to tell us that," said Mr Pink, with a knowing smile. "You're at headquarters—eh, sir? That was what I said to Mr Scales the other day. He came for some straps, Mr Scales did, and he asked that question in pretty near the same terms that you've done, sir, and I answered him, as I may say, ditto. Not meaning any disrespect to you, sir, but a way of speaking."

"Come, that's gammon, Pink," said Christian. "You know everything. You can tell me, if you will, who is the fellow employed to paste up Transome's handbills?"

"What do *you* say, Mr Sims?" said Pink, looking at the auctioneer.

"Why, you know and I know well enough. It's Tommy Trounsem—an old, crippling, half-mad fellow. Most people know Tommy. I've employed him myself for charity."

"Where shall I find him?" said Christian.

"At the Cross-Keys, in Pollard's End, most likely," said Mr Sims. "I don't know where he puts himself when he isn't at the public."

"He was a stoutish fellow fifteen year ago, when he carried pots," said Mr Pink.

"Ay, and has snared many a hare in his time," said Mr Sims. "But he was always a little cracked. Lord bless you! he used to swear he'd a right to the Transome estate."

"Why, what put that notion into his head?" said Christian, who had learned more than he expected.

"The lawing, sir—nothing but the lawing about the estate. There was a deal of it twenty year ago," said Mr Pink. "Tommy happened to turn up hereabout at that time; a big, lungeous fellow, who would speak disrespectfully of hanybody."

"O, he meant no harm," said Mr Sims. "He was fond of a drop to drink, and not quite right in the upper storey, and he could hear no difference between Trounsem and Transome. It's an odd way of speaking they have in that part where he was born—a little north'ard. You'll hear it in his tongue now, if you talk to him."

"At the Cross-Keys I shall find him, eh?" said Christian, getting off his stool. "Good-day, Pink, good-day."

Christian went straight from the saddler's to Quorlen's, the Tory printer's, with whom he had contrived a political spree. Quorlen was a new man in Treby,

who had so reduced the trade of Dow, the old hereditary printer, that Dow had lapsed to Whiggery and Radicalism and opinions in general, so far as they were contented to express themselves in a small stock of types. Quorlen had brought his Duffield wit with him, and insisted that religion and joking were the handmaids of politics; on which principle he and Christian undertook the joking, and left the religion to the Rector. The joke at present in question was a practical one. Christian, turning into the shop, merely said, "I've found him out—give me the placards;" and, tucking a thickish flat bundle, wrapped in a black glazed cotton bag, under his arm, walked out into the dusk again.

"Suppose now," he said to himself, as he strode along—"suppose there should be some secret to be got out of this old scamp, or some notion that's as good as a secret to those who know how to use it? That would be virtue rewarded. But I'm afraid the old tosspot is not likely to be good for much. There's truth in wine, and there may be some in gin and muddy beer; but whether it's truth worth my knowing, is another question. I've got plenty of truth in my time out of men who were half-seas-over, but never any that was worth a sixpence to me."

The Cross-Keys was a very old-fashioned "pub-

lic:" its bar was a big rambling kitchen, with an undulating brick floor; the small-paned windows threw an interesting obscurity over the far-off dresser, garnished with pewter and tin, and with large dishes that seemed to speak of better times; the two settles were half pushed under the wide-mouthed chimney; and the grate, with its brick hobs, massive iron crane, and various pothooks, suggested a generous plenty possibly existent in all moods and tenses except the indicative present. One way of getting an idea of our fellow-countrymen's miseries is to go and look at their pleasures. The Cross-Keys had a fungous-featured landlord and a yellow sickly landlady, with a napkin bound round her head like a resuscitated Lazarus; it had doctored ale, an odour of bad tobacco, and remarkably strong cheese. It was not what Astræa, when come back, might be expected to approve as the scene of ecstatic enjoyment for the beings whose special prerogative it is to lift their sublime faces towards heaven. Still, there was ample space on the hearth—accommodation for narrative bagmen or boxmen—room for a man to stretch his legs; his brain was not pressed upon by a white wall within a yard of him, and the light did not stare in mercilessly on bare ugliness, turning the fire to ashes. Compared with some beerhouses of this

more advanced period, the Cross-Keys of that day presented a high standard of pleasure.

But though this venerable "public" had not failed to share in the recent political excitement of drinking, the pleasures it offered were not at this early hour of the evening sought by a numerous company. There were only three or four pipes being smoked by the firelight, but it was enough for Christian when he found that one of these was being smoked by the bill-sticker, whose large flat basket, stuffed with placards, leaned near him against the settle. So splendid an apparition as Christian was not a little startling at the Cross-Keys, and was gazed at in expectant silence; but he was a stranger in Pollard's End, and was taken for the highest style of traveller when he declared that he was deucedly thirsty, ordered sixpennyworth of gin and a large jug of water, and, putting a few drops of the spirit into his own glass, invited Tommy Trounsem, who sat next him, to help himself. Tommy was not slower than a shaking hand obliged him to be in accepting this invitation. He was a tall broad-shouldered old fellow, who had once been good-looking; but his cheeks and chest were both hollow now, and his limbs were shrunken.

"You've got some bills there, master, eh?" said

Christian, pointing to the basket. "Is there an auction coming on?"

"Auction? no," said Tommy, with a gruff hoarseness, which was the remnant of a jovial bass, and with an accent which differed from the Trebian fitfully, as an early habit is wont to reassert itself. "I've nought to do wi' auctions; I'm a pol'tical charicter. It's me am getting Trounsem into Parl'ment."

"Trounsem, says he," the landlord observed, taking out his pipe with a low laugh. "It's Transome, sir. Maybe you don't belong to this part. It's the candidate 'ull do most for the working men, and's proved it too, in the way o' being open-handed and wishing 'em to enjoy themselves. If I'd twenty votes, I'd give one for Transome, and I don't care who hears me."

The landlord peeped out from his fungous cluster of features with a beery confidence that the high figure of twenty had somehow raised the hypothetic value of his vote.

"Spilkins, now," said Tommy, waving his hand to the landlord, "you let one genelman speak to another, will you? This genelman wants to know about my bills. Does he, or doesn't he?"

"What then? I spoke according," said the landlord, mildly holding his own.

"You're all very well, Spilkins," returned Tommy, "but y'aren't me. I know what the bills are. It's public business. I'm none o' your common bill-stickers, master; I've left off sticking up ten guineas reward for a sheep-stealer, or low stuff like that. These are Trounsem's bills; and I'm the rightful family, and so I give him a lift. A Trounsem I am, and a Trounsem I'll be buried; and if Old Nick tries to lay hold on me for poaching, I'll say, 'You be hanged for a lawyer, Old Nick; every hare and pheasant on the Trounsem's land is mine;' and what rises the family, rises old Tommy; and we're going to get into Parl'ment—that's the long and the short on't, master. And I'm the head o' the family, and I stick the bills. There's Johnsons, and Thomsons, and Jacksons, and Billsons; but I'm a Trounsem, I am. What do you say to that, master?"

This appeal, accompanied by a blow on the table, while the landlord winked at the company, was addressed to Christian, who answered, with severe gravity,

"I say there isn't any work more honourable than bill-sticking."

"No, no," said Tommy, wagging his head from side to side. "I thought you'd come in to that. I thought you'd know better than say contrairy.

But I'll shake hands wi' you; I don't want to knock any man's head off. I'm a good chap—a sound crock —an old family kep' out o' my rights. I shall go to heaven, for all Old Nick."

As these celestial prospects might imply that a little extra gin was beginning to tell on the bill-sticker, Christian wanted to lose no time in arresting his attention. He laid his hand on Tommy's arm and spoke emphatically.

"But I'll tell you what you bill-stickers are not up to. You should be on the look-out when Debarry's side have stuck up fresh bills, and go and paste yours over them. I know where there's a lot of Debarry's bills now. Come along with me, and I'll show you. We'll paste them over, and then we'll come back and treat the company."

"Hooray!" said Tommy. "Let's be off then."

He was one of the thoroughly inured, originally hale drunkards, and did not easily lose his head or legs or the ordinary amount of method in his talk. Strangers often supposed that Tommy was tipsy when he had only taken what he called "one blessed pint," chiefly from that glorious contentment with himself and his adverse fortunes which is not usually characteristic of the sober Briton. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, seized his paste-vessel

and his basket, and prepared to start, with a satisfactory promise that he could know what he was about.

The landlord and some others had confidently concluded that they understood all about Christian now. He was a Transome's man, come to see after the bill-sticking in Transome's interest. The landlord, telling his yellow wife snappishly to open the door for the gentleman, hoped soon to see him again.

"This is a Transome's house, sir," he observed, "in respect of entertaining customers of that colour. I do my duty as a publican, which, if I know it, is to turn back no genelman's money. I say, give every genelman a chance, and the more the merrier, in Parl'ment and out of it. And if anybody says they want but two Parl'ment men, I say it 'ud be better for trade if there was six of 'em, and voters according."

"Ay, ay," said Christian; "you're a sensible man, landlord. You don't mean to vote for Debarry then, eh?"

"Not nohow," said the landlord, thinking that where negatives were good the more you heard of them the better.

As soon as the door had closed behind Christian and his new companion, Tommy said,

"Now, master, if you're to be my lantern, don't you be a Jacky Lantern, which I take to mean one as leads you the wrong way. For I'll tell you what — if you've had the luck to fall in wi' Tommy Trounsem, don't you let him drop."

"No, no—to be sure not," said Christian. "Come along here. We'll go to the Back Brewery wall first."

"No, no; don't you let me drop. Give me a shilling any day you like, and I'll tell you more nor you'll hear from Spilkins in a week. There isna many men like me. I carried pots for fifteen year off and on—what do you think o' that now, for a man as might ha' lived up there at Trounsem Park, and snared his own game? Which I'd ha' done," said Tommy, wagging his head at Christian in the dimness undisturbed by gas. "None o' your shooting for me—it's two to one you'll miss. Snaring's more fishing-like. You bait your hook, and if it isna the fishes' goodwill to come, that's nothing again' the sporting genelman. And that's what I say by snaring."

"But if you'd a right to the Transome estate, how was it you were kept out of it, old boy? It was some foul shame or other, eh?"

"It's the law—that's what it is. You're a good

sort o' chap; I don't mind telling you. There's folks born to property, and there's folks catch hold on it; and the law's made for them as catch hold. I'm pretty deep; I see a good deal further than Spilkins. There was Ned Patch, the pedlar, used to say to me, 'You canna read, Tommy,' says he. 'No; thank you,' says I; 'I'm not going to crack my headpiece to make myself as big a fool as you.' I was fond o' Ned. Many's the pot we've had together."

"I see well enough you're deep, Tommy. How came you to know you were born to property?"

"It was the regester—the parish regester," said Tommy, with his knowing wag of the head, "that shows as you was born. I allays felt it inside me as I was somebody, and I could see other chaps thought it on me too; and so one day at Littleshaw, where I kep ferrets and a little bit of a public, there comes a fine man looking after me, and walking me up and down wi' questions. And I made out from the clerk as he'd been at the regester; and I gave the clerk a pot or two, and he got it of our parson as the name o' Trounsem was a great name hereabout. And I waits a bit for my fine man to come again. Thinks I, if there's property wants a right owner, I shall be called for; for I didn't

know the law then. And I waited and waited, till I see'd no fun i' waiting. So I parted wi' my public and my ferrets—for she was dead a'ready, my wife was, and I hadn't no cumbrance. And off I started a pretty long walk to this country-side, for I could walk for a wager in them days."

"Ah! well, here we are at the Back Brewery wall. Put down your paste and your basket now, old boy, and I'll help you. You paste, and I'll give you the bills, and then you can go on talking."

Tommy obeyed automatically, for he was now carried away by the rare opportunity of talking to a new listener, and was only eager to go on with his story. As soon as his back was turned, and he was stooping over his paste-pot, Christian, with quick adroitness, exchanged the placards in his own bag for those in Tommy's basket. Christian's placards had not been printed at Treby, but were a new lot which had been sent from Duffield that very day—"highly spiced," Quorlen had said, "coming from a pen that was up to that sort of thing." Christian had read the first of the sheaf, and supposed they were all alike. He proceeded to hand one to Tommy, and said,

"Here, old boy, paste this over the other. And

so, when you got into this country-side, what did you do?"

"Do? Why, I put up at a good public and ordered the best, for I'd a bit o' money in my pocket; and I axed about, and they said to me, if it's Trounsem business you're after, you go to Lawyer Jermyn. And I went; and says I, going along, he's maybe the fine man as walked me up and down. But no such thing. I'll tell you what Lawyer Jermyn was. He stands you there, and holds you away from him wi' a pole three yard long. He stares at you, and says nothing, till you feel like a Tomfool; and then he threats you to set the justice on you; and then he's sorry for you, and hands you money, and preaches you a sarmint, and tells you you're a poor man, and he'll give you a bit of advice—and you'd better not be meddling wi' things belonging to the law, else you'll be catched up in a big wheel and fly to bits. And I went of a cold sweat, and I wished I might never come i' sight o' Lawyer Jermyn again. But he says, if you keep i' this neighbourhood, behave yourself well, and I'll pertect you. I were deep enough, but it's no use being deep, 'cause you can never know the law. And there's times when the deepest fellow's worst frightened."

"Yes, yes. There! Now for another placard. And so that was all?"

"All?" said Tommy, turning round and holding the paste-brush in suspense. "Don't you be running too quick. Thinks I, 'I'll meddle no more. I've got a bit o' money—I'll buy a basket, and be a potman. It's a pleasant life. I shall live at publics and see the world, and pick up 'quaintance, and get a chanch penny.' But when I'd turned into the Red Lion, and got myself warm again wi' a drop o' hot, something jumps into my head. Thinks I, Tommy, you've done finely for yourself: you're a rat as has broke up your house to take a journey, and show yourself to a ferret. And then it jumps into my head: I'd once two ferrets as turned on one another, and the little un killed the big un. Says I to the landlady, 'Missis, could you tell me of a lawyer,' says I, 'not very big or fine, but a second size—a pig-potato, like?' 'That I can,' says she; 'there's one now in the bar parlour.' 'Be so kind as bring us together,' says I. And she cries out—I think I hear her now—'Mr Johnson!' And what do you think?"

At this crisis in Tommy's story the grey clouds, which had been gradually thinning, opened sufficiently to let down the sudden moonlight, and

show his poor battered old figure and face in the attitude and with the expression of a narrator sure of the coming effect on his auditor; his body and neck stretched a little on one side, and his paste-brush held out with an alarming intention of tapping Christian's coat-sleeve at the right moment. Christian started to a safe distance, and said,

"It's wonderful. I can't tell what to think."

"Then never do you deny Old Nick," said Tommy, with solemnity. "I've believed in him more ever since. Who was Johnson? Why, Johnson was the fine man as had walked me up and down with questions. And I out with it to him then and there. And he speaks me civil, and says, 'Come away wi' me, my good fellow.' And he told me a deal o' law. And he says, whether you're a Tommy Trounsem or no, it's no good to you, but only to them as have got hold o' the property. If you was a Tommy Trounsem twenty times over, it 'ud be no good, for the law's bought you out; and your life's no good, only to them as have catched hold o' the property. The more you live, the more they'll stick in. Not as they want you now, says he—you're no good to anybody, and you might howl like a dog for iver, and the law 'ud take no notice on you. Says John-

son, I'm doing a kind thing by you, to tell you. For that's the law. And if you want to know the law, master, you ask Johnson. I heard 'em say after, as he was an understrapper at Jermyn's. I've never forgot it from that day to this. But I saw clear enough, as if the law hadn't been again' me, the Trounsem estate 'ud ha' been mine. But folks are fools hereabouts, and I've left off talking. The more you tell 'em the truth, the more they'll niver believe you. And I went and bought my basket and the pots, and——"

"Come, then, fire away," said Christian. "Here's another placard."

"I'm getting a bit dry, master."

"Well, then, make haste, and you'll have something to drink all the sooner."

Tommy turned to his work again, and Christian, continuing his help, said, "And how long has Mr Jermyn been employing you?"

"Oh, no particular time—off and on; but a week or two ago he sees me upo' the road, and speaks to me uncommon civil, and tells me to go up to his office, and he'll give me employ. And I was noways unwilling to stick the bills to get the family into Parl'ment. For there's no man can help the law. And the family's the family, whether you carry pots

or no. Master, I'm uncommon dry; my head's a turning round; it's talking so long on end."

The unwonted excitement of poor Tommy's memory was producing a reaction.

"Well, Tommy," said Christian, who had just made a discovery among the placards which altered the bent of his thoughts, "you may go back to the Cross-Keys now, if you like; here's a half-crown for you to spend handsomely. I can't go back there myself just yet; but you may give my respects to Spilkins, and mind you paste the rest of the bills early to-morrow morning."

"Ay, ay. But don't you believe too much i' Spilkins," said Tommy, pocketing the half-crown, and showing his gratitude by giving this advice—"he's no harm much—but weak. He thinks he's at the bottom o' things because he scores you up. But I bear him no ill-will. Tommy Trounsem's a good chap; and any day you like to give me half-a-crown, I'll tell you the same story over again. Not now; I'm dry. Come, help me up wi' these things; you're a younger chap than me. Well, I'll tell Spilkins you'll come again another day."

The moonlight, which had lit up poor Tommy's oratorical attitude, had served to light up for Christian the print of the placards. He had expected the

copies to be various, and had turned them half over at different depths of the sheaf before drawing out those he offered to the bill-sticker. Suddenly the clearer light had shown him on one of them a name which was just then especially interesting to him, and all the more when occurring in a placard intended to dissuade the electors of North Loamshire from voting for the heir of the Transomes. He hastily turned over the lists that preceded and succeeded, that he might draw out and carry away all of this pattern; for it might turn out to be wiser for him not to contribute to the publicity of handbills which contained allusions to Bycliffe *versus* Transome. There were about a dozen of them; he pressed them together and thrust them into his pocket, returning all the rest to Tommy's basket. To take away this dozen might not be to prevent similar bills from being posted up elsewhere, but he had reason to believe that these were all of the same kind which had been sent to Treby from Duffield.

Christian's interest in his practical joke had died out like a morning rushlight. Apart from this discovery in the placards, old Tommy's story had some indications in it that were worth pondering over. Where was that well-informed Johnson now? Was he still an understrapper of Jermyn's?

With this matter in his thoughts, Christian only turned in hastily at Quorlen's, threw down the black bag which contained the captured Radical handbills, said he had done the job, and hurried back to the Manor that he might study his problem.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I doe believe that, as the gall has severall receptacles in several creatures, soe there's scarce any creature but hath that emunctorye somewhere.—Sir Thomas Browne.

Fancy what a game at chess would be if all the chessmen had passions and intellects, more or less small and cunning: if you were not only uncertain about your adversary's men, but a little uncertain also about your own; if your knight could shuffle himself on to a new square by the sly; if your bishop, in disgust at your castling, could wheedle your pawns out of their places; and if your pawns, hating you because they are pawns, could make away from their appointed posts that you might get checkmate on a sudden. You might be the longest-headed of deductive reasoners, and yet you might be beaten by your own pawns. You would be especially likely to be beaten, if you depended arrogantly on your mathematical

imagination, and regarded your passionate pieces with contempt.

Yet this imaginary chess is easy compared with the game a man has to play against his fellow-men with other fellow-men for his instruments. He thinks himself sagacious, perhaps, because he trusts no bond except that of self-interest; but the only self-interest he can safely rely on is what seems to be such to the mind he would use or govern. Can he ever be sure of knowing this?

Matthew Jermyn was under no misgivings as to the fealty of Johnson. He had "been the making of Johnson;" and this seems to many men a reason for expecting devotion, in spite of the fact that they themselves, though very fond of their own persons and lives, are not at all devoted to the Maker they believe in. Johnson was a most serviceable subordinate. Being a man who aimed at respectability, a family man, who had a good church-pew, subscribed for engravings of banquet pictures where there were portraits of political celebrities, and wished his children to be more unquestionably genteel than their father, he presented all the more numerous handles of worldly motive by which a judicious superior might keep a hold on him. But this useful regard to respectability had

its inconvenience in relation to such a superior: it was a mark of some vanity and some pride, which, if they were not touched just in the right handling-place, were liable to become raw and sensitive. Jermyn was aware of Johnson's weaknesses, and thought he had flattered them sufficiently. But on the point of knowing when we are disagreeable, our human nature is fallible. Our lavender-water, our smiles, our compliments, and other polite falsities, are constantly offensive, when in the very nature of them they can only be meant to attract admiration and regard. Jermyn had often been unconsciously disagreeable to Johnson, over and above the constant offence of being an ostentatious patron. He would never let Johnson dine with his wife and daughters; he would not himself dine at Johnson's house when he was in town. He often did what was equivalent to pooh-poohing his conversation by not even appearing to listen, and by suddenly cutting it short with a query on a new subject. Jermyn was able and politic enough to have commanded a great deal of success in his life, but he could not help being handsome, arrogant, fond of being heard, indisposed to any kind of comradeship, amorous and bland towards women, cold and self-contained towards men. You will hear very strong

denials that an attorney's being handsome could enter into the dislike he excited; but conversation consists a good deal in the denial of what is true. From the British point of view masculine beauty is regarded very much as it is in the drapery business:—as good solely for the fancy department—for young noblemen, artists, poets, and the clergy. Some one who, like Mr Lingon, was disposed to revile Jermyn (perhaps it was Sir Maximus), had called him "a cursed, sleek, handsome, long-winded, overbearing sycophant;" epithets which expressed, rather confusedly, the mingled character of the dislike he excited. And serviceable John Johnson, himself sleek, and mindful about his broadcloth and his cambric fronts, had what he considered "spirit" enough within him to feel that dislike of Jermyn gradually gathering force through years of obligation and subjection, till it had become an actuating motive disposed to use an opportunity, if not to watch for one.

It was not this motive, however, but rather the ordinary course of business, which accounted for Johnson's playing a double part as an electioneering agent. What men do in elections, is not to be classed either among sins or marks of grace: it would be profane to include business in religion, and con-

science refers to failure, not to success. Still, the sense of being galled by Jermyn's harness was an additional reason for cultivating all relations that were independent of him; and pique at Harold Transome's behaviour to him in Jermyn's office perhaps gave all the more zest to Johnson's use of his pen and ink when he wrote a handbill in the service of Garstin, and Garstin's incomparable agent, Putty, full of inuendoes against Harold Transome, as a descendant of the Durfey-Transomes. It is a natural subject of self-congratulation to a man, when special knowledge, gained long ago without any forecast, turns out to afford a special inspiration in the present; and Johnson felt a new pleasure in the consciousness that he of all people in the world next to Jermyn had the most intimate knowledge of the Transome affairs. Still better—some of these affairs were secrets of Jermyn's. If in an uncomplimentary spirit he might have been called Jermyn's "man of straw," it was a satisfaction to know that the unreality of the man John Johnson was confined to his appearance in annuity deeds, and that elsewhere he was solid, locomotive, and capable of remembering anything for his own pleasure and benefit. To act with doubleness towards a man whose own conduct was double, was so near

an approach to virtue that it deserved to be called by no meaner name than Diplomacy.

By such causes it came to pass that Christian held in his hands a bill in which Jermyn was playfully alluded to as Mr German Cozen, who won games by clever shuffling and odd tricks without any honour, and backed Durfey's crib against Bycliffe,—in which it was adroitly implied that the so-called head of the Transomes was only the tail of the Durfeys,—and that some said the Durfeys would have died out and left their nest empty if it had not been for their German Cozen.

Johnson had not dared to use any recollections except such as might credibly exist in other minds besides his own. In the truth of the case, no one but himself had the prompting to recall these outworn scandals; but it was likely enough that such foul-winged things should be revived by election heats for Johnson to escape all suspicion.

Christian could gather only dim and uncertain inferences from this flat irony and heavy joking; but one chief thing was clear to him. He had been right in his conjecture that Jermyn's interest about Bycliffe had its source in some claim of Bycliffe's on the Transome property. And then, there was that story of the old bill-sticker's, which, closely

considered, indicated that the right of the present Transomes depended, or at least had depended, on the continuance of some other lives. Christian in his time had gathered enough legal notions to be aware that possession by one man sometimes depended on the life of another; that a man might sell his own interest in property, and the interest of his descendants, while a claim on that property would still remain to some one else than the purchaser, supposing the descendants became extinct, and the interest they had sold were at an end. But under what conditions the claim might be valid or void in any particular case, was all darkness to him. Suppose Bycliffe had any such claim on the Transome estates: how was Christian to know whether at the present moment it was worth anything more than a bit of rotten parchment? Old Tommy Trounsem had said that Johnson knew all about it. But even if Johnson were still aboveground—and all Johnsons are mortal—he might still be an understrapper of Jermyn's, in which case his knowledge would be on the wrong side of the hedge for the purposes of Henry Scaddon. His immediate care must be to find out all he could about Johnson. He blamed himself for not having questioned Tommy further while he had him at

command; but on this head the bill-sticker could hardly know more than the less dilapidated denizens of Treby.

Now it had happened that during the weeks in which Christian had been at work in trying to solve the enigma of Jermyn's interest about Bycliffe, Johnson's mind also had been somewhat occupied with suspicion and conjecture as to new information on the subject of the old Bycliffe claims which Jermyn intended to conceal from him. The letter which, after his interview with Christian, Jermyn had written with a sense of perfect safety to his faithful ally Johnson, was, as we know, written to a Johnson who had found his self-love incompatible with that faithfulness of which it was supposed to be the foundation. Anything that the patron felt it inconvenient for his obliged friend and servant to know, became by that very fact an object of peculiar curiosity. The obliged friend and servant secretly doated on his patron's inconvenience, provided that he himself did not share it; and conjecture naturally became active.

Johnson's legal imagination, being very differently furnished from Christian's, was at no loss to conceive conditions under which there might arise a new claim on the Transome estates. He had before

him the whole history of the settlement of those estates made a hundred years ago by John Justus Transome, entailing them, whilst in his possession, on his son Thomas and his heirs-male, with remainder to the Bycliffes in fee. He knew that Thomas, son of John Justus, proving a prodigal, had, without the knowledge of his father, the tenant in possession, sold his own and his descendants' rights to a lawyer-cousin named Durfey; that, therefore, the title of the Durfey-Transomes, in spite of that old Durfey's tricks to show the contrary, depended solely on the purchase of the "base fee" thus created by Thomas Transome; and that the Bycliffes were the "remainder-men" who might fairly oust the Durfey-Transomes if ever the issue of the prodigal Thomas went clean out of existence, and ceased to represent a right which he had bargained away from them.

Johnson, as Jermyn's subordinate, had been closely cognisant of the details concerning the suit instituted by successive Bycliffes, of whom Maurice Christian Bycliffe was the last, on the plea that the extinction of Thomas Transome's line had actually come to pass—a weary suit, which had eaten into the fortunes of two families, and had only made the cankerworms fat. The suit had closed with the

death of Maurice Christian Bycliffe in prison; but before his death, Jermyn's exertions to get evidence that there was still issue of Thomas Transome's line surviving, as a security of the Durfey title, had issued in the discovery of a Thomas Transome at Littleshaw, in Stonyshire, who was the representative of a pawned inheritance. The death of Maurice had made this discovery useless—had made it seem the wiser part to say nothing about it; and the fact had remained a secret known only to Jermyn and Johnson. No other Bycliffe was known or believed to exist, and the Durfey-Transomes might be considered safe, unless—yes, there was an "unless" which Johnson could conceive: an heir or heiress of the Bycliffes—if such a personage turned out to be in existence—might some time raise a new and valid claim when once informed that wretched old Tommy Trounsem the bill-sticker, tottering drunkenly on the edge of the grave, was the last issue remaining above ground from that dissolute Thomas who played his Esau part a century before. While the poor old bill-sticker breathed, the Durfey-Transomes could legally keep their possession in spite of a possible Bycliffe proved real; but not when the parish had buried the bill-sticker.

Still, it is one thing to conceive conditions, and another to see any chance of proving their existence. Johnson at present had no glimpse of such a chance; and even if he ever gained the glimpse, he was not sure that he should ever make any use of it. His inquiries of Medwin, in obedience to Jermyn's letter, had extracted only a negative as to any information possessed by the lawyers of Bycliffe concerning a marriage, or expectation of offspring on his part. But Johnson felt not the less stung by curiosity to know what Jermyn had found out: that he had found something in relation to a possible Bycliffe, Johnson felt pretty sure. And he thought with satisfaction that Jermyn could not hinder him from knowing what he already knew about Thomas Transome's issue. Many things might occur to alter his policy and give a new value to facts. Was it certain that Jermyn would always be fortunate?

When greed and unscrupulousness exhibit themselves on a grand historical scale, and there is question of peace or war or amicable partition, it often occurs that gentlemen of high diplomatic talents have their minds bent on the same object from different points of view. Each, perhaps, is thinking of a certain duchy or province, with a view to arranging the ownership in such a way as shall best serve

the purposes of the gentleman with high diplomatic talents in whom each is more especially interested. But these select minds in high office can never miss their aims from ignorance of each other's existence or whereabouts. Their high titles may be learned even by common people from every pocket almanac.

But with meaner diplomatists, who might be mutually useful, such ignorance is often obstructive. Mr John Johnson and Mr Christian, otherwise Henry Scaddon, might have had a concentration of purpose and an ingenuity of device fitting them to make a figure in the parcelling of Europe, and yet they might never have met, simply because Johnson knew nothing of Christian, and because Christian did not know where to find Johnson.

CHAPTER XXX.

His nature is too noble for the world:
He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
Or Jove for his power to thunder. His heart's his mouth:
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent;
And, being angry, doth forget that ever
He heard the name of death.—*Coriolanus.*

CHRISTIAN and Johnson did meet, however, by means that were quite incalculable. The incident which brought them into communication was due to Felix Holt, who of all men in the world had the least affinity either for the industrious or the idle parasite.

Mr Lyon had urged Felix to go to Duffield on the 15th of December, to witness the nomination of the candidates for North Loamshire. The minister wished to hear what took place; and the pleasure of gratifying him helped to outweigh some opposing reasons.

"I shall get into a rage at something or other," Felix had said. "I've told you one of my weak

points. Where I have any particular business, I must incur the risks my nature brings. But I've no particular business at Duffield. However, I'll make a holiday and go. By dint of seeing folly, I shall get lessons in patience."

The weak point to which Felix referred was his liability to be carried completely out of his own mastery by indignant anger. His strong health, his renunciation of selfish claims, his habitual preoccupation with large thoughts and with purposes independent of everyday casualties, secured him a fine and even temper, free from moodiness or irritability. He was full of long-suffering towards his unwise mother, who "pressed him daily with her words and urged him, so that his soul was vexed;" he had chosen to fill his days in a way that required the utmost exertion of patience, that required those little rill-like out-flowings of goodness which in minds of great energy must be fed from deep sources of thought and passionate devotedness. In this way his energies served to make him gentle; and now, in this twenty-sixth year of his life, they had ceased to make him angry, except in the presence of something that roused his deep indignation. When once exasperated, the passionateness of his nature threw off the yoke of a long-trained con-

sciousness in which thought and emotion had been more and more completely mingled, and concentrated itself in a rage as ungovernable as that of boyhood. He was thoroughly aware of the liability, and knew that in such circumstances he could not answer for himself. Sensitive people with feeble frames have often the same sort of fury within them; but they are themselves shattered, and shatter nothing. Felix had a terrible arm: he knew that he was dangerous; and he avoided the conditions that might cause him exasperation, as he would have avoided intoxicating drinks if he had been in danger of intemperance.

The nomination-day was a great epoch of successful trickery, or, to speak in a more parliamentary manner, of war-stratagem, on the part of skilful agents. And Mr Johnson had his share of inward chuckling and self-approval, as one who might justly expect increasing renown, and be some day in as general request as the great Putty himself. To have the pleasure and the praise of electioneering ingenuity, and also to get paid for it, without too much anxiety whether the ingenuity will achieve its ultimate end, perhaps gives to some select persons a sort of satisfaction in their superiority to their more agitated fellow-men that is worthy to be

classed with those generous enjoyments of having the truth chiefly to yourself, and of seeing others in danger of drowning while you are high and dry, which seem to have been regarded as unmixed privileges by Lucretius and Lord Bacon.

One of Mr Johnson's great successes was this. Spratt, the hated manager of the Sproxton Colliery, in careless confidence that the colliers and other labourers under him would follow his orders, had provided carts to carry some loads of voteless enthusiasm to Duffield on behalf of Garstin; enthusiasm which, being already paid for by the recognised benefit of Garstin's existence as a capitalist with a share in the Sproxton mines, was not to cost much in the form of treating. A capitalist was held worthy of pious honour as the cause why working men existed. But Mr Spratt did not sufficiently consider that a cause which has to be proved by argument or testimony is not an object of passionate devotion to colliers: a visible cause of beer acts on them much more strongly. And even if there had been any love of the far-off Garstin, hatred of the too-immediate Spratt would have been the stronger motive. Hence Johnson's calculations, made long ago with Chubb, the remarkable publican, had been well founded, and there had been diligent care

to supply treating at Duffield in the name of Transome. After the election was over, it was not improbable that there would be much friendly joking between Putty and Johnson as to the success of this trick against Putty's employer, and Johnson would be conscious of rising in the opinion of his celebrated senior.

For the show of hands and the cheering, the hustling and the pelting, the roaring and the hissing, the hard hits with small missiles, and the soft hits with small jokes, were strong enough on the side of Transome to balance the similar "demonstrations" for Garstin, even with the Debarry interest in his favour. And the inconvenient presence of Spratt was early got rid of by a dexterously managed accident, which sent him bruised and limping from the scene of action. Mr Chubb had never before felt so thoroughly that the occasion was up to a level with his talents, while the clear daylight in which his virtue would appear when at the election he voted, as his duty to himself bound him, for Garstin only, gave him thorough repose of conscience.

Felix Holt was the only person looking on at the senseless exhibitions of this nomination-day, who knew from the beginning the history of the trick with the Sproxton men. He had been aware all

along that the treating at Chubb's had been continued, and that so far Harold Transome's promise had produced no good fruits; and what he was observing to-day, as he watched the uproarious crowd, convinced him that the whole scheme would be carried out just as if he had never spoken about it. He could be fair enough to Transome to allow that he might have wished, and yet have been unable, with his notions of success, to keep his promise; and his bitterness towards the candidate only took the form of contemptuous pity; for Felix was not sparing in his contempt for men who put their inward honour in pawn by seeking the prizes of the world. His scorn fell too readily on the fortunate. But when he saw Johnson passing to and fro, and speaking to Jermyn on the hustings, he felt himself getting angry, and jumped off the wheel of the stationary cart on which he was mounted, that he might no longer be in sight of this man, whose vitiating cant had made his blood hot and his fingers tingle on the first day of encountering him at Sproxton. It was a little too exasperating to look at this pink-faced rotund specimen of prosperity, to witness the power for evil that lay in his vulgar cant, backed by another man's money, and to know that such stupid iniquity

flourished the flags of Reform, and Liberalism, and justice to the needy. While the roaring and the scuffling were still going on, Felix, with his thick stick in his hand, made his way through the crowd, and walked on through the Duffield streets till he came out on a grassy suburb, where the houses surrounded a small common. Here he walked about in the breezy air, and ate his bread and apples, telling himself that this angry haste of his about evils that could only be remedied slowly, could be nothing else than obstructive, and might some day—he saw it so clearly that the thought seemed like a presentiment—be obstructive of his own work.

"Not to waste energy, to apply force where it would tell, to do small work close at hand, not waiting for speculative chances of heroism, but preparing for them"—these were the rules he had been constantly urging on himself. But what could be a greater waste than to beat a scoundrel who had law and opodeldoc at command? After this meditation, Felix felt cool and wise enough to return into the town, not, however, intending to deny himself the satisfaction of a few pungent words wherever there was place for them. Blows are sarcasms turned stupid: wit is a form of force that leaves the limbs at rest.

Anything that could be called a crowd was no longer to be seen. The show of hands having been pronounced to be in favour of Debarry and Transome, and a poll having been demanded for Garstin, the business of the day might be considered at an end. But in the street where the hustings were erected, and where the great hotels stood, there were many groups, as well as strollers and steady walkers to and fro. Men in superior greatcoats and well-brushed hats were awaiting with more or less impatience an important dinner, either at the Crown, which was Debarry's house, or at the Three Cranes, which was Garstin's, or at the Fox and Hounds, which was Transome's. Knots of sober retailers, who had already dined, were to be seen at some shop-doors; men in very shabby coats and miscellaneous head-coverings, inhabitants of Duffield and not county voters, were lounging about in dull silence, or listening, some to a grimy man in a flannel shirt, hatless and with turbid red hair, who was insisting on political points with much more ease than had seemed to belong to the gentlemen speakers on the hustings, and others to a Scotch vendor of articles useful to sell, whose unfamiliar accent seemed to have a guarantee of truth in it wanting as an association

with everyday English. Some rough-looking pipe-smokers, or distinguished cigar-smokers, chose to walk up and down in isolation and silence. But the majority of those who had shown a burning interest in the nomination had disappeared, and cockades no longer studded a close-pressed crowd, like, and also very unlike, meadow flowers among the grass. The street pavement was strangely painted with fragments of perishable missiles ground flat under heavy feet: but the workers were resting from their toil, and the buzz and tread and the fitfully discernible voices seemed like stillness to Felix after the roar with which the wide space had been filled when he left it.

The group round the speaker in the flannel shirt stood at the corner of a side-street, and the speaker himself was elevated by the head and shoulders above his hearers, not because he was tall, but because he stood on a projecting stone. At the opposite corner of the turning was the great inn of the Fox and Hounds, and this was the ultra-Liberal quarter of the High Street. Felix was at once attracted by this group; he liked the look of the speaker, whose bare arms were powerfully muscular, though he had the pallid complexion of a man who lives chiefly amidst the heat of furnaces. He was leaning

against the dark stone building behind him with folded arms, the grimy paleness of his shirt and skin standing out in high relief against the dark stone building behind him. He lifted up one fore-finger, and marked his emphasis with it as he spoke. His voice was high and not strong, but Felix recognised the fluency and the method of a habitual preacher or lecturer.

"It's the fallacy of all monopolists," he was saying. "We know what monopolists are: men who want to keep a trade all to themselves, under the pretence that they'll furnish the public with a better article. We know what that comes to: in some countries a poor man can't afford to buy a spoonful of salt, and yet there's salt enough in the world to pickle every living thing in it. That's the sort of benefit monopolists do to mankind. And these are the men who tell us we're to let politics alone; they'll govern us better without our knowing anything about it. We must mind our business; we are ignorant; we've no time to study great questions. But I tell them this: the greatest question in the world is, how to give every man a man's share in what goes on in life——"

"Hear, hear!" said Felix, in his sonorous voice, which seemed to give a new impressiveness to what the speaker had said. Every one looked at him:

the well-washed face and its educated expression along with a dress more careless than that of most well-to-do workmen on a holiday, made his appearance strangely arresting.

"Not a pig's share," the speaker went on, "not a horse's share, not the share of a machine fed with oil only to make it work and nothing else. It isn't a man's share just to mind your pin-making, or your glass-blowing, and higgle about your own wages, and bring up your family to be ignorant sons of ignorant fathers, and no better prospect; that's a slave's share; we want a freeman's share, and that is to think and speak and act about what concerns us all, and see whether these fine gentlemen who undertake to govern us are doing the best they can for us. They've got the knowledge, say they. Very well, we've got the wants. There's many a one would be idle if hunger didn't pinch him; but the stomach sets us to work. There's a fable told where the nobles are the belly and the people the members. But I make another sort of fable. I say, we are the belly that feels the pinches, and we'll set these aristocrats, these great people who call themselves our brains, to work at some way of satisfying us a bit better. The aristocrats are pretty sure to try and govern for their own

benefit; but how are we to be sure they'll try and govern for ours? They must be looked after, I think, like other workmen. We must have what we call inspectors, to see whether the work's well done for us. We want to send our inspectors to Parliament. Well, they say—you've got the Reform Bill; what more can you want? Send your inspectors. But I say, the Reform Bill is a trick—it's nothing but swearing-in special constables to keep the aristocrats safe in their monopoly; it's bribing some of the people with votes to make them hold their tongues about giving votes to the rest. I say, if a man doesn't beg or steal, but works for his bread, the poorer and the more miserable he is, the more he'd need have a vote to send an inspector to Parliament—else the man who is worst off is likely to be forgotten; and I say, he's the man who ought to be first remembered. Else what does their religion mean? Why do they build churches and endow them that their sons may get paid well for preaching a Saviour, and making themselves as little like Him as can be? If I want to believe in Jesus Christ, I must shut my eyes for fear I should see a parson. And what's a bishop? A bishop's a parson dressed up, who sits in the House of Lords to help and throw out Reform Bills. And because it's hard

to get anything in the shape of a man to dress himself up like that, and do such work, they give him a palace for it, and plenty of thousands a-year. And then they cry out—'The Church is in danger,'—'the poor man's Church.' And why is it the poor man's Church? Because he can have a seat for nothing. I think it *is* for nothing; for it would be hard to tell what he gets by it. If the poor man had a vote in the matter, I think he'd choose a different sort of a Church to what that is. But do you think the aristocrats will ever alter it, if the belly doesn't pinch them? Not they. It's part of their monopoly. They'll supply us with our religion like everything else, and get a profit on it. They'll give us plenty of heaven. We may have land *there*. That's the sort of religion they like—a religion that gives us working men heaven, and nothing else. But we'll offer to change with 'em. We'll give them back some of their heaven, and take it out in something for us and our children in this world. They don't seem to care so much about heaven themselves till they feel the gout very bad; but you won't get them to give up anything else, if you don't pinch 'em for it. And to pinch them enough, we must get the suffrage, we must get votes, that we may send the men to Parliament who will do our

work for us; and we must have Parliament dissolved every year, that we may change our man if he doesn't do what we want him to do; and we must have the country divided so that the little kings of the counties can't do as they like, but must be shaken up in one bag with us. I say, if we working men are ever to get a man's share, we must have universal suffrage, and annual Parliaments, and the vote by ballot, and electoral districts."

"No!—something else before all that," said Felix, again startling the audience into looking at him. But the speaker glanced coldly at him and went on.

"That's what Sir Francis Burdett went in for fifteen years ago; and it's the right thing for us, if it was Tomfool who went in for it. You must lay hold of such handles as you can. I don't believe much in Liberal aristocrats; but if there's any fine carved gold-headed stick of an aristocrat will make a broomstick of himself, I'll lose no time but I'll sweep with him. And that's what I think about Transome. And if any of you have acquaintance among county voters, give 'em a hint that you wish 'em to vote for Transome."

At the last word, the speaker stepped down from his slight eminence, and walked away rapidly, like a man whose leisure was exhausted, and who must

go about his business. But he had left an appetite in his audience for further oratory, and one of them seemed to express a general sentiment as he turned immediately to Felix, and said, "Come, sir, what do you say?"

Felix did at once what he would very likely have done without being asked—he stepped on to the stone, and took off his cap by an instinctive prompting that always led him to speak uncovered. The effect of his figure in relief against the stone background was unlike that of the previous speaker. He was considerably taller, his head and neck were more massive, and the expression of his mouth and eyes was something very different from the mere acuteness and rather hard-lipped antagonism of the trades-union man. Felix Holt's face had the look of habitual meditative abstraction from objects of mere personal vanity or desire, which is the peculiar stamp of culture, and makes a very roughly-cut face worthy to be called "the human face divine." Even lions and dogs know a distinction between men's glances; and doubtless those Duffield men, in the expectation with which they looked up at Felix, were unconsciously influenced by the grandeur of his full yet firm mouth, and the calm clearness of his grey eyes, which were somehow

unlike what they were accustomed to see along with an old brown velvcteen coat, and an absence of chin-propping. When he began to speak, the contrast of voice was still stronger than that of appearance. The man in the flannel shirt had not been heard—had probably not cared to be heard—beyond the immediate group of listeners. But Felix at once drew the attention of persons comparatively at a distance.

"In my opinion," he said, almost the moment after he was addressed, "that was a true word spoken by your friend when he said the great question was how to give every man a man's share in life. But I think he expects voting to do more towards it than I do. I want the working men to have power. I'm a working man myself, and I don't want to be anything else. But there are two sorts of power. There's a power to do mischief—to undo what has been done with great expense and labour, to waste and destroy, to be cruel to the weak, to lie and quarrel, and to talk poisonous nonsense. That's the sort of power that ignorant numbers have. It never made a joint stool or planted a potato. Do you think it's likely to do much towards governing a great country, and making wise laws, and giving shelter, food, and clothes to millions of men? Ignorant power comes in the end to the same thing as wicked

power; it makes misery. It's another sort of power that I want us working men to have, and I can see plainly enough that our all having votes will do little towards it at present. I hope we, or the children that come after us, will get plenty of political power some time. I tell everybody plainly, I hope there will be great changes, and that some time, whether we live to see it or not, men will have come to be ashamed of things they're proud of now. But I should like to convince you that votes would never give you political power worth having while things are as they are now, and that if you go the right way to work you may get power sooner without votes. Perhaps all you who hear me are sober men, who try to learn as much of the nature of things as you can, and to be as little like fools as possible. A fool or idiot is one who expects things to happen that never can happen; he pours milk into a can without a bottom, and expects the milk to stay there. The more of such vain expectations a man has, the more he is of a fool or idiot. And if any working man expects a vote to do for him what it never can do, he's foolish to that amount, if no more. I think that's clear enough, eh?"

"Hear, hear," said several voices, but they were not those of the original group; they belonged to

some strollers who had been attracted by Felix Holt's vibrating voice, and were Tories from the Crown. Among them was Christian, who was smoking a cigar with a pleasure he always felt in being among people who did not know him, and doubtless took him to be something higher than he really was. Hearers from the Fox and Hounds also were slowly adding themselves to the nucleus. Felix, accessible to the pleasure of being listened to, went on with more and more animation:

"The way to get rid of folly is to get rid of vain expectations, and of thoughts that don't agree with the nature of things. The men who have had true thoughts about water, and what it will do when it is turned into steam and under all sorts of circumstances, have made themselves a great power in the world: they are turning the wheels of engines that will help to change most things. But no engines would have done, if there had been false notions about the way water would act. Now, all the schemes about voting, and districts, and annual Parliaments, and the rest, are engines, and the water or steam—the force that is to work them—must come out of human nature—out of men's passions, feelings, desires. Whether the engines will do good work or bad depends on these feel-

ings; and if we have false expectations about men's characters, we are very much like the idiot who thinks he'll carry milk in a can without a bottom. In my opinion, the notions about what mere voting will do are very much of that sort."

"That's very fine," said a man in dirty fustian, with a scornful laugh. "But how are we to get the power without votes?"

"I'll tell you what's the greatest power under heaven," said Felix, "and that is public opinion—the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what is shameful. That's the steam that is to work the engines. How can political freedom make us better, any more than a religion we don't believe in, if people laugh and wink when they see men abuse and defile it? And while public opinion is what it is—while men have no better beliefs about public duty—while corruption is not felt to be a damning disgrace—while men are not ashamed in Parliament and out of it to make public questions which concern the welfare of millions a mere screen for their own petty private ends,—I say, no fresh scheme of voting will much mend our condition. For, take us working men of all sorts. Suppose out of every hundred who had a vote there were thirty who had

some soberness, some sense to choose with, some good feeling to make them wish the right thing for all. And suppose there were seventy out of the hundred who were, half of them, not sober, who had no sense to choose one thing in politics more than another, and who had so little good feeling in them that they wasted on their own drinking the money that should have helped to feed and clothe their wives and children; and another half of them who, if they didn't drink, were too ignorant or mean or stupid to see any good for themselves better than pocketing a five-shilling piece when it was offered them. Where would be the political power of the thirty sober men? The power would lie with the seventy drunken and stupid votes; and I'll tell you what sort of men would get the power—what sort of men would end by returning whom they pleased to Parliament."

Felix had seen every face around him, and had particularly noticed a recent addition to his audience; but now he looked before him without appearing to fix his glance on any one. In spite of his cooling meditations an hour ago, his pulse was getting quickened by indignation, and the desire to crush what he hated was likely to vent itself in articulation. His tone became more biting.

"They would be men who would undertake to do the business for a candidate, and return him: men who have no real opinions, but who pilfer the words of every opinion, and turn them into a cant which will serve their purpose at the moment; men who look out for dirty work to make their fortunes by, because dirty work wants little talent and no conscience; men who know all the ins and outs of bribery, because there is not a cranny in their own souls where a bribe can't enter. Such men as these will be the masters wherever there's a majority of voters who care more for money, more for drink, more for some mean little end which is their own and nobody else's, than for anything that has ever been called Right in the world. For suppose there's a poor voter named Jack, who has seven children, and twelve or fifteen shillings a-week wages, perhaps less. Jack can't read—I don't say whose fault that is—he never had the chance to learn; he knows so little that he perhaps thinks God made the poor-laws, and if anybody said the pattern of the workhouse was laid down in the Testament, he wouldn't be able to contradict them. What is poor Jack likely to do when he sees a smart stranger coming to him, who happens to be just one of those men that I say will be the

masters till public opinion gets too hot for them? He's a middle-sized man, we'll say; stout, with coat upon coat of fine broadcloth, open enough to show a fine gold chain: none of your dark, scowling men, but one with an innocent pink-and-white skin and very smooth light hair—a most respectable man, who calls himself by a good, sound, well-known English name—as Green, or Baker, or Wilson, or, let us say, Johnson——"

Felix was interrupted by an explosion of laughter from a majority of the bystanders. Some eyes had been turned on Johnson, who stood on the right hand of Felix, at the very beginning of the description, and these were gradually followed by others, till at last every hearer's attention was fixed on him, and the first burst of laughter from the two or three who knew the attorney's name, let every one sufficiently into the secret to make the amusement common. Johnson, who had kept his ground till his name was mentioned, now turned away, looking unusually white after being unusually red, and feeling by an attorney's instinct for his pocket-book, as if he felt it was a case for taking down the names of witnesses.

All the well-dressed hearers turned away too, thinking they had had the cream of the speech in

the joke against Johnson, which, as a thing worth telling, helped to recall them to the scene of dinner.

"Who is this Johnson?" said Christian to a young man who had been standing near him, and had been one of the first to laugh. Christian's curiosity had naturally been awakened by what might prove a golden opportunity.

"O—a London attorney. He acts for Transome. That tremendous fellow at the corner there is some red-hot Radical demagogue, and Johnson has offended him, I suppose; else he wouldn't have turned in that way on a man of their own party."

"I had heard there was a Johnson who was an understrapper of Jermyn's," said Christian.

"Well, so this man may have been for what I know. But he's a London man now—a very busy fellow—on his own legs in Bedford Row. Ha ha! It's capital, though, when these Liberals get a slap in the face from the working men they're so very fond of."

Another turn along the street enabled Christian to come to a resolution. Having seen Jermyn drive away an hour before, he was in no fear: he walked at once to the Fox and Hounds and asked to speak to Mr Johnson. A brief interview, in which Chris-

tian ascertained that he had before him the Johnson mentioned by the bill-sticker, issued in the appointment of a longer one at a later hour; and before they left Duffield they had come not exactly to a mutual understanding, but to an exchange of information mutually welcome.

Christian had been very cautious in the commencement, only intimating that he knew something important which some chance hints had induced him to think might be interesting to Mr Johnson, but that this entirely depended on how far he had a common interest with Mr Jermyn. Johnson replied that he had much business in which that gentleman was not concerned, but that to a certain extent they had a common interest. Probably then, Christian observed, the affairs of the Transome estate were part of the business in which Mr Jermyn and Mr Johnson might be understood to represent each other—in which case he need not detain Mr Johnson? At this hint Johnson could not conceal that he was becoming eager. He had no idea what Christian's information was, but there were many grounds on which Johnson desired to know as much as he could about the Transome affairs independently of Jermyn. By little and little an understanding was arrived at. Christian told of his interview with

Tommy Trounsem, and stated that if Johnson could show him whether the knowledge could have any legal value, he could bring evidence that a legitimate child of Bycliffe's existed: he felt certain of his fact, and of his proof. Johnson explained, that in this case the death of the old bill-sticker would give the child the first valid claim to the Bycliffe heirship; that for his own part he should be glad to further a true claim, but that caution must be observed. How did Christian know that Jermyn was informed on this subject? Christian, more and more convinced that Johnson would be glad to counteract Jermyn, at length became explicit about Esther, but still withheld his own real name, and the nature of his relations with Bycliffe. He said he would bring the rest of his information when Mr Johnson took the case up seriously, and placed it in the hands of Bycliffe's old lawyers—of course he would do that? Johnson replied that he would certainly do that; but that there were legal niceties which Mr Christian was probably not acquainted with; that Esther's claim had not yet accrued; and that hurry was useless.

The two men parted, each in distrust of the other, but each well pleased to have learned something. Johnson was not at all sure how he should act, but

thought it likely that events would soon guide him. Christian was beginning to meditate a way of securing his own ends without depending in the least on Johnson's procedure. It was enough for him that he was now assured of Esther's legal claim on the Transome estates.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"In the copia of the factious language the word Tory was entertained, . . and being a vocal clever-sounding word, readily pronounced, it kept its hold, and took possession of the foul mouths of the faction. The Loyalists began to cheer up and to take heart of grace, and in the working of this crisis, according to the common laws of scolding, they considered which way to make payment for so much of Tory as they had been treated with, to clear scores. . . Immediately the train took, and ran like wildfire and became general. And so the account of Tory was balanced, and soon began to run up a sharp score on the other side."—NORTH'S *Examen*, p. 321.

AT last the great epoch of the election for North Loamshire had arrived. The roads approaching Treby were early traversed by a larger number of vehicles, horsemen, and also foot-passengers, than were ever seen there at the annual fair. Treby was the polling-place for many voters whose faces were quite strange in the town; and if there were some strangers who did not come to poll, though they had business not unconnected with the election, they were not liable to be regarded with suspicion or especial curiosity. It was understood that no division of a county had ever been more thoroughly canvassed, and that there would be a hard run be-

tween Garstin and Transome. Mr Johnson's head-quarters were at Duffield; but it was a maxim which he repeated after the great Putty, that a capable agent makes himself omnipresent; and quite apart from the express between him and Jermyn, Mr John Johnson's presence in the universe had potent effects on this December day at Treby Magna.

A slight drizzling rain which was observed by some Tories who looked out of their bedroom windows before six o'clock, made them hope that, after all, the day might pass off better than alarmists had expected. The rain was felt to be somehow on the side of quiet and Conservatism; but soon the breaking of the clouds and the mild gleams of a December sun brought back previous apprehensions. As there were already precedents for riot at a Reformed election, and as the Trebian district had had its confidence in the natural course of things somewhat shaken by a landed proprietor with an old name offering himself as a Radical candidate, the election had been looked forward to by many with a vague sense that it would be an occasion something like a fighting match, when bad characters would probably assemble, and there might be struggles and alarms for respectable men, which would make it expedient

for them to take a little neat brandy as a precaution beforehand and a restorative afterwards. The tenants on the Transome estate were comparatively fearless: poor Mr Goffe, of Rabbit's End, considered that "one thing was as mauling as another," and that an election was no worse than the sheep-rot; while Mr Dibbs, taking the more cheerful view of a prosperous man, reflected that if the Radicals were dangerous, it was safer to be on their side. It was the voters for Debarry and Garstin who considered that they alone had the right to regard themselves as targets for evil-minded men; and Mr Crowder, if he could have got his ideas countenanced, would have recommended a muster of farm-servants with defensive pitchforks on the side of Church and King. But the bolder men were rather gratified by the prospect of being groaned at, so that they might face about and groan in return.

Mr Crow, the high constable of Treby, inwardly rehearsed a brief address to a riotous crowd in case it should be wanted, having been warned by the Rector that it was a primary duty on these occasions to keep a watch against provocation as well as violence. The Rector, with a brother magistrate who was on the spot, had thought it desirable to swear in some special constables, but the presence of loyal

men not absolutely required for the polling was not looked at in the light of a provocation. The Benefit Clubs from various quarters made a show, some with the orange-coloured ribbons and streamers of the true Tory candidate, some with the mazarine of the Whig. The orange-coloured bands played "Auld Langsyne," and a louder mazarine band came across them with "O whistle and I will come to thee, my lad"—probably as the tune the most symbolical of Liberalism which their repertory would furnish. There was not a single club bearing the Radical blue: the Sproxton Club members wore the mazarine, and Mr Chubb wore so much of it that he looked (at a sufficient distance) like a very large gentianella. It was generally understood that "these brave fellows," representing the fine institution of Benefit Clubs, and holding aloft the motto, "Let brotherly love continue," were a civil force calculated to encourage voters of sound opinions and keep up their spirits. But a considerable number of unadorned heavy navvies, colliers, and stone-pit men, who used their freedom as British subjects to be present in Treby on this great occasion, looked like a possibly uncivil force whose politics were dubious until it was clearly seen for whom they cheered and for whom they groaned.

Thus the way up to the polling-booths was variously lined, and those who walked it, to whatever side they belonged, had the advantage of hearing from the opposite side what were the most marked defects or excesses in their personal appearance; for the Trebians of that day held, without being aware that they had Cicero's authority for it, that the bodily blemishes of an opponent were a legitimate ground for ridicule; but if the voter frustrated wit by being handsome, he was groaned at and satirised according to a formula, in which the adjective was Tory, Whig, or Radical, as the case might be, and the substantive a blank to be filled up after the taste of the speaker.

Some of the more timid had chosen to go through this ordeal as early as possible in the morning. One of the earliest was Mr Timothy Rose, the gentleman-farmer from Leek Malton. He had left home with some foreboding, having swathed his more vital parts in layers of flannel, and put on two greatcoats as a soft kind of armour. But reflecting with some trepidation that there were no resources for protecting his head, he once more wavered in his intention to vote; he once more observed to Mrs Rose that these were hard times when a man of independent property was expected to vote

"willy-nilly;" but finally, coerced by the sense that he should be looked ill on "in these times" if he did not stand by the gentlemen round about, he set out in his gig, taking with him a powerful waggoner, whom he ordered to keep him in sight as he went to the polling-booth. It was hardly more than nine o'clock when Mr Rose, having thus come up to the level of his times, cheered himself with a little cherry-brandy at the Marquis, drove away in a much more courageous spirit, and got down at Mr Nolan's, just outside the town. The retired Londoner, he considered, was a man of experience, who would estimate properly the judicious course he had taken, and could make it known to others. Mr Nolan was superintending the removal of some shrubs in his garden.

"Well, Mr Nolan," said Rose, twinkling a self-complacent look over the red prominence of his cheeks, "have you been to give your vote yet?"

"No; all in good time. I shall go presently."

"Well, I wouldn't lose an hour, I wouldn't. I said to myself, if I've got to do gentlemen a favour, I'll do it at once. You see, I've got no landlord, Nolan—I'm in that position o' life that I can be independent."

"Just so, my dear sir," said the wiry-faced Nolan,

pinching his under-lip between his thumb and finger, and giving one of those wonderful universal shrugs, by which he seemed to be recalling all his garments from a tendency to disperse themselves. "Come in and see Mrs Nolan?"

"No, no, thankye. Mrs Rose expects me back. But, as I was saying, I'm a independent man, and I consider it's not my part to show favour to one more than another, but to make things as even as I can. If I'd been a tenant to anybody, well, in course I must have voted for my landlord—that stands to sense. But I wish everybody well; and if one's returned to Parliament more than another, nobody can say it's my doing; for when you can vote for two, you can make things even. So I gave one to Debarry and one to Transome; and I wish Garstin no ill, but I can't help the odd number, and he hangs on to Debarry, they say."

"God bless me, sir," said Mr Nolan, coughing down a laugh, "don't you perceive that you might as well have stayed at home and not voted at all, unless you would rather send a Radical to Parliament than a sober Whig?"

"Well, I'm sorry you should have anything to say against what I've done, Nolan," said Mr Rose, rather crestfallen, though sustained by inward

warmth. "I thought you'd agree with me, as you're a sensible man. But the most a independent man can do is to try and please all; and if he hasn't the luck—here's wishing I may do it another time," added Mr Rose, apparently confounding a toast with a salutation, for he put out his hand for a passing shake, and then stepped into his gig again.

At the time that Mr Timothy Rose left the town, the crowd in King Street and in the market-place, where the polling-booths stood, was fluctuating. Voters as yet were scanty, and brave fellows who had come from any distance this morning, or who had sat up late drinking the night before, required some reinforcement of their strength and spirits. Every public-house in Treby, not excepting the venerable and sombre Cross-Keys, was lively with changing and numerous company. Not, of course, that there was any treating: treating necessarily had stopped, from moral scruples, when once "the writs were out;" but there was drinking, which did equally well under any name.

Poor Tommy Trounsem, breakfasting here on Falstaff's proportion of bread, and something which, for gentility's sake, I will call sack, was more than usually victorious over the ills of life, and felt him-

self one of the heroes of the day. He had an immense light-blue cockade in his hat, and an amount of silver in a dirty little canvass bag which astonished himself. For some reason, at first inscrutable to him, he had been paid for his bill-sticking with great liberality at Mr Jermyn's office, in spite of his having been the victim of a trick by which he had once lost his own bills and pasted up Debarry's; but he soon saw that this was simply a recognition of his merit as "an old family kept out of its rights," and also of his peculiar share in an occasion when the family was to get into Parliament. Under these circumstances, it was due from him that he should show himself prominently where business was going forward, and give additional value by his presence to every vote for Transome. With this view he got a half-pint bottle filled with his peculiar kind of "sack," and hastened back to the market-place, feeling good-natured and patronising towards all political parties, and only so far partial as his family bound him to be.

But a disposition to concentrate at that extremity of King Street which issued in the market-place was not universal among the increasing crowd. Some of them seemed attracted towards another

nucleus at the other extremity of King Street, near the Seven Stars. This was Garstin's chief house, where his committee sat, and it was also a point which must necessarily be passed by many voters entering the town on the eastern side. It seemed natural that the mazarine colours should be visible here, and that Pack, the tall "shepherd" of the Sproxton men, should be seen moving to and fro where there would be a frequent opportunity of cheering the voters for a gentleman who had the chief share in the Sproxton mines. But the side lanes and entries out of King Street were numerous enough to relieve any pressure if there was need to make way. The lanes had a distinguished reputation. Two of them had odours of brewing; one had a side entrance to Mr Tiliot's wine and spirit vaults; up another Mr Muscat's cheeses were frequently being unloaded; and even some of the entries had those cheerful suggestions of plentiful provision which were among the characteristics of Treby.

Between ten and eleven the voters came in more rapid succession, and the whole scene became spirited. Cheers, sarcasms, and oaths, which seemed to have a flavour of wit for many hearers, were beginning to be reinforced by more practical

demonstrations, dubiously jocose. There was a disposition in the crowd to close and hem in the way for voters, either going or coming, until they had paid some kind of toll. It was difficult to see who set the example in the transition from words to deeds. Some thought it was due to Jacob Cuff, a Tory charity-man, who was a well-known ornament of the pothouse, and gave his mind much leisure for amusing devices; but questions of origination in stirring periods are notoriously hard to settle. It is by no means necessary in human things that there should be only one beginner. This, however, is certain—that Mr Chubb, who wished it to be noticed that he voted for Garstin solely, was one of the first to get rather more notice than he wished, and that he had his hat knocked off and crushed in the interest of Debarry by Tories opposed to coalition. On the other hand, some said it was at the same time that Mr Pink, the saddler, being stopped on his way and made to declare that he was going to vote for Debarry, got himself well chalked as to his coat, and pushed up an entry, where he remained the prisoner of terror combined with the want of any back outlet, and never gave his vote that day.

The second Tory joke was performed with much

gusto. The majority of the Transome tenants came in a body from the Ram Inn, with Mr Banks the bailiff leading them. Poor Goffe was the last of them, and his worn melancholy look and forward-leaning gait gave the jocose Cuff the notion that the farmer was not what he called "compus." Mr Goffe was cut off from his companions and hemmed in; asked, by voices with hot breath close to his ear, how many horses he had, how many cows, how many fat pigs; then jostled from one to another, who made trumpets with their hands and deafened him by telling him to vote for Debarry. In this way the melancholy Goffe was hustled on till he was at the polling-booth—filled with confused alarms, the immediate alarm being that of having to go back in still worse fashion than he had come. Arriving in this way after the other tenants had left, he astonished all hearers who knew him for a tenant of the Transomes by saying "Debarry," and was jostled back trembling amid shouts of laughter.

By stages of this kind the fun grew faster, and was in danger of getting rather serious. The Tories began to feel that their jokes were returned by others of a heavier sort, and that the main strength of the crowd was not on the side of sound opinion,

but might come to be on the side of sound cudgelling and kicking. The navvies and pitmen in dishabille seemed to be multiplying, and to be clearly not belonging to the party of Order. The shops were freely resorted to for various forms of playful missiles and weapons; and news came to the magistrates, watching from the large window of the Marquis, that a gentleman coming in on horseback at the other end of the street to vote for Garstin had had his horse turned round and frightened into a headlong gallop out of it again.

Mr Crow and his subordinates, and all the special constables, felt that it was necessary to make some energetic effort, or else every voter would be intimidated and the poll must be adjourned. The Rector determined to get on horseback and go amidst the crowd with the constables; and he sent a message to Mr Lingon, who was at the Ram, calling on him to do the same. "Sporting Jack" was sure the good fellows meant no harm, but he was courageous enough to face any bodily dangers, and rode out in his brown leggings and coloured bandanna, speaking persuasively.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when this sally was made: the constables and magistrates tried the most pacific measures, and they seemed to succeed.

There was a rapid thinning of the crowd: the most boisterous disappeared, or seemed to do so by becoming quiet; missiles ceased to fly, and a sufficient way was cleared for voters along King Street. The magistrates returned to their quarters, and the constables took convenient posts of observation. Mr Wace, who was one of Debarry's committee, had suggested to the Rector that it might be wise to send for the military from Duffield, with orders that they should station themselves at Hathercote, three miles off: there was so much property in the town that it would be better to make it secure against risks. But the Rector felt that this was not the part of a moderate and wise magistrate, unless the signs of riot recurred. He was a brave man, and fond of thinking that his own authority sufficed for the maintenance of the general good in Treby.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Never more
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before
Without the sense of that which I forbore—
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

MRS BROWNING.

FELIX HOLT, seated at his work without his pupils, who had asked for a holiday with a notion that the wooden booths promised some sort of show, noticed about eleven o'clock that the noises which reached him from the main street were getting more and more tumultuous. He had long seen bad auguries for this election, but, like all people who dread the prophetic wisdom that ends in desiring the fulfilment of its own evil forebodings, he had checked himself with remembering that, though many condi-

tions were possible which might bring on violence, there were just as many which might avert it. There would, perhaps, be no other mischief than what he was already certain of. With these thoughts he had sat down quietly to his work, meaning not to vex his soul by going to look on at things he would fain have made different if he could. But he was of a fibre that vibrated too strongly to the life around him to shut himself away in quiet, even from suffering and irremediable wrong. As the noises grew louder, and wrought more and more strongly on his imagination, he was obliged to lay down his delicate wheel-work. His mother came from her turnip-paring in the kitchen, where little Job was her companion, to observe that they must be killing everybody in the High Street, and that the election, which had never been before at Treby, must have come for a judgment; that there were mercies where you didn't look for them, and that she thanked God in His wisdom for making her live up a back street.

Felix snatched his cap and rushed out. But when he got to the turning into the market-place the magistrates were already on horseback there, the constables were moving about, and Felix observed that there was no strong spirit of resist-

ance to them. He stayed long enough to see the partial dispersion of the crowd and the restoration of tolerable quiet, and then went back to Mrs Holt to tell her that there was nothing to fear now: he was going out again, and she must not be in any anxiety at his absence. She might set by his dinner for him.

Felix had been thinking of Esther and her probable alarm at the noises that must have reached her more distinctly than they had reached him, for Malthouse Yard was removed but a little way from the main street. Mr Lyon was away from home, having been called to preach charity sermons and attend meetings in a distant town; and Esther, with the plaintive Lyddy for her sole companion, was not cheerfully circumstanced. Felix had not been to see her yet since her father's departure, but to-day he gave way to new reasons.

"Miss Esther was in the garret," Lyddy said, trying to see what was going on. But before she was fetched she came running down the stairs, drawn by the knock at the door, which had shaken the small dwelling.

"I am so thankful to see you," she said, eagerly. "Pray come in."

When she had shut the parlour door behind them,

Felix said, "I suspected that you might have been made anxious by the noises. I came to tell you that things are quiet now. Though, indeed, you can hear that they are."

"I *was* frightened," said Esther. "The shouting and roaring of rude men is so hideous. It is a relief to me that my father is not at home—that he is out of the reach of any danger he might have fallen into if he had been here. But I gave you credit for being in the midst of the danger," she added, smiling, with a determination not to show much feeling. "Sit down and tell me what has happened."

They sat down at the extremities of the old black sofa, and Felix said,

"To tell you the truth, I had shut myself up, and tried to be as indifferent to the election as if I'd been one of the fishes in the Lapp, till the noises got too strong for me. But I only saw the tail end of the disturbance. The poor noisy simpletons seemed to give way before the magistrates and the constables. I hope nobody has been much hurt. The fear is that they may turn out again by-and-by; their giving way so soon may not be altogether a good sign. There's a great number of heavy fellows in the town. If they go and drink

more, the last end may be worse than the first. However——"

Felix broke off, as if this talk were futile, clasped his hands behind his head, and, leaning backward, looked at Esther, who was looking at him.

"May I stay here a little while?" he said, after a moment, which seemed long.

"Pray do," said Esther, colouring. To relieve herself she took some work and bowed her head over her stitching. It was in reality a little heaven to her that Felix was there, but she saw beyond it —saw that by-and-by he would be gone, and that they should be farther on their way, not towards meeting, but parting. His will was impregnable. He was a rock, and she was no more to him than the white clinging mist-cloud.

"I wish I could be sure that you see things just as I do," he said, abruptly, after a minute's silence.

"I am sure you see them much more wisely than I do," said Esther, almost bitterly, without looking up.

"There are some people one must wish to judge one truly. Not to wish it would be mere hardness. I know you think I am a man without feeling—at least, without strong affections. You think I love nothing but my own resolutions."

"Suppose I reply in the same sort of strain?" said Esther, with a little toss of the head.

"How?"

"Why, that you think me a shallow woman, incapable of believing what is best in you, setting down everything that is too high for me as a deficiency."

"Don't parry what I say. Answer me." There was an expression of painful beseeching in the tone with which Felix said this. Esther let her work fall on her lap and looked at him, but she was unable to speak.

"I want you to tell me—once—that you know it would be easier to me to give myself up to loving and being loved, as other men do, when they can, than to——"

This breaking-off in speech was something quite new in Felix. For the first time he had lost his self-possession, and turned his eyes away. He was at variance with himself. He had begun what he felt that he ought not to finish.

Esther, like a woman as she was—a woman waiting for love, never able to ask for it—had her joy in these signs of her power; but they made her generous, not chary, as they might have done if she had had a pettier disposition. She said, with deep yet timid earnestness,

"What you have chosen to do has only convinced me that your love would be the better worth having."

All the finest part of Esther's nature trembled in those words. To be right in great memorable moments, is perhaps the thing we need most desire for ourselves.

Felix as quick as lightning turned his look upon her again, and, leaning forward, took her sweet hand and held it to his lips some moments before he let it fall again and raised his head.

"We shall always be the better for thinking of each other," he said, leaning his elbow on the back of the sofa, and supporting his head as he looked at her with calm sadness. "This thing can never come to me twice over. It is my knighthood. That was always a business of great cost."

He smiled at her, but she sat biting her inner lip, and pressing her hands together. She desired to be worthy of what she reverenced in Felix, but the inevitable renunciation was too difficult. She saw herself wandering through the future weak and forsaken. The charming sauciness was all gone from her face, but the memory of it made this child-like dependent sorrow all the more touching.

"Tell me what you would——" Felix burst out,

leaning nearer to her; but the next instant he started up, went to the table, took his cap in his hand, and came in front of her.

"Good-bye," he said, very gently, not daring to put out his hand. But Esther put up hers instead of speaking. He just pressed it and then went away.

She heard the doors close behind him, and felt free to be miserable. She cried bitterly. If she might have married Felix Holt, she could have been a good woman. She felt no trust that she could ever be good without him.

Felix reproached himself. He would have done better not to speak in that way. But the prompting to which he had chiefly listened had been the desire to prove to Esther that he set a high value on her feelings. He could not help seeing that he was very important to her; and he was too simple and sincere a man to ape a sort of humility which would not have made him any the better if he had possessed it. Such pretences turn our lives into sorry dramas. And Felix wished Esther to know that her love was dear to him as the beloved dead are dear. He felt that they must not marry—that they would ruin each other's lives. But he had longed for her to know fully that his will to be always apart from

her was renunciation, not an easy preference. In this he was thoroughly generous; and yet, now some subtle, mysterious conjuncture of impressions and circumstances had made him speak, he questioned the wisdom of what he had done. Express confessions give definiteness to memories that might more easily melt away without them; and Felix felt for Esther's pain as the strong soldier, who can march on hungering without fear that he shall faint, feels for the young brother—the maiden-cheeked conscript whose load is too heavy for him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Mischief, thou art afoot.
Julius Cæsar.

FELIX could not go home again immediately after quitting Esther. He got out of the town, skirted it a little while, looking across the December stillness of the fields, and then re-entered it by the main road into the market-place, thinking that, after all, it would be better for him to look at the busy doings of men than to listen in solitude to the voices within him; and he wished to know how things were going on.

It was now nearly half-past one, and Felix perceived that the street was filling with more than the previous crowd. By the time he got in front of the booths, he was himself so surrounded by men who were being thrust hither and thither that retreat would have been impossible; and he went where he was obliged to go, although his height and strength were above the average even in a crowd where there

were so many heavy-armed workmen used to the pick-axe. Almost all shabby-coated Trebians must have been there, but the entries and back-streets of the town did not supply the mass of the crowd; and besides the rural incomers, both of the more decent and the rougher sort, Felix, as he was pushed along, thought he discerned here and there men of that keener aspect which is only common in manufacturing towns.

But at present there was no evidence of any distinctly mischievous design. There was only evidence that the majority of the crowd were excited with drink, and that their action could hardly be calculated on more than those of oxen and pigs congregated amidst hootings and pushings. The confused deafening shouts, the incidental fighting, the knocking over, pulling and scuffling, seemed to increase every moment. Such of the constables as were mixed with the crowd were quite helpless; and if an official staff was seen above the heads, it moved about fitfully, showing as little sign of a guiding hand as the summit of a buoy on the waves. Doubtless many hurts and bruises had been received, but no one could know the amount of injuries that were widely scattered.

It was clear that no more voting could be done,

and the poll had been adjourned. The probabilities of serious mischief had grown strong enough to prevail over the Rector's objection to getting military aid within reach; and when Felix re-entered the town, a galloping messenger had already been despatched to Duffield. The Rector wished to ride out again, and read the Riot Act from a point where he could be better heard than from the window of the Marquis; but Mr Crow, the high constable, who had returned from closer observation, insisted that the risk would be too great. New special constables had been sworn in, but Mr Crow said prophetically that if once mischief began, the mob was past caring for constables.

But the Rector's voice was ringing and penetrating, and when he appeared on the narrow balcony and read the formula, commanding all men to go to their homes or about their lawful business, there was a strong transient effect. Every one within hearing listened, and for a few moments after the final words, "God save the King!" the comparative silence continued. Then the people began to move, the buzz rose again, and grew, and grew, till it turned to shouts and roaring as before. The movement was that of a flood hemmed in; it carried nobody away. Whether the crowd would obey the

order to disperse themselves within an hour, was a doubt that approached nearer and nearer to a negative certainty.

Presently Mr Crow, who held himself a tactician, took a well-intentioned step, which went far to fulfil his own prophecy. He had arrived with the magistrates by a back way at the Seven Stars, and here again the Riot Act was read from a window, with much the same result as before. The Rector had returned by the same way to the Marquis, as the headquarters most suited for administration, but Mr Crowe remained at the other extremity of King Street, where some awe-striking presence was certainly needed. Seeing that the time was passing, and all effect from the voice of law had disappeared, he showed himself at an upper window, and addressed the crowd, telling them that the soldiers had been sent for, and that if they did not disperse they would have cavalry upon them instead of constables.

Mr Crow, like some other high constables more celebrated in history, "enjoyed a bad reputation;" that is to say, he enjoyed many things which caused his reputation to be bad, and he was anything but popular in Treby. It is probable that a pleasant message would have lost something from his lips,

and what he aetually said was so unpleasant, that, instead of persuading the erowd, it appeared to enrage them. Some one, snatehing a raw potato from a saek in the greengrocer's shop behind him, threw it at the eonstable, and hit him on the mouth. Straightway raw potatoes and turnips were flying by twenties at the windows of the Seven Stars, and the panes were smashed. Felix, who was half-way up the street, heard the voiees turning to a savage roar, and saw a rush towards the hardware shop, whieh furnished more effective weapons and missiles than turnips and potatoes. Then a ery ran along that the Tories had sent for the soldiers, and if those among the mob who ealled themselves Tories as willingly as anything else were disposed to take whatever ealled itself the Tory side, they only helped the main result of reckless disorder.

But there were proofs that the predominant will of the erowd was against "Debarry's men," and in favour of Transome. Several shops were invaded, and they were all of them "Tory shops." The tradesmen who eould do so, now loeked their doors and barrieaded their windows within. There was a panic among the householders of this hitherto peaeeful town, and a general anxiety for the military to arrive. The Reetor was in painful anxiety

on this head: he had sent out two messengers as secretly as he could towards Hathercote, to order the soldiers to ride straight to the town; but he feared that these messengers had been somehow intercepted.

It was three o'clock: more than an hour had elapsed since the reading of the Riot Act. The Rector of Treby Magna wrote an indignant message and sent it to the Ram, to Mr Lingon, the Rector of Little Treby, saying that there was evidently a Radical animus in the mob, and that Mr Transome's party should hold themselves peculiarly responsible. Where was Mr Jermyn?

Mr Lingon replied that he was going himself out towards Duffield to see after the soldiers. As for Jermyn, he was not that attorney's sponsor: he believed that Jermyn was gone away somewhere on business—to fetch voters.

A serious effort was now being made by all the civil force at command. The December day would soon be passing into evening, and all disorder would be aggravated by obscurity. The horrors of fire were as likely to happen as any minor evil. The constables, as many of them as could do so, armed themselves with carbines and sabres: all the respectable inhabitants who had any courage, prepared

themselves to struggle for order; and many felt with Mr Wace and Mr Tiliot that the nearest duty was to defend the breweries and the spirit and wine vaults, where the property was of a sort at once most likely to be threatened and most dangerous in its effects. The Rector, with fine determination, got on horseback again, as the best mode of leading the constables, who could only act efficiently in a close body. By his direction the column of armed men avoided the main street, and made their way along a back road, that they might occupy the two chief lanes leading to the wine-vaults and the brewery, and bear down on the crowd from these openings, which it was especially desirable to guard.

Meanwhile Felix Holt had been hotly occupied in King Street. After the first window-smashing at the Seven Stars, there was a sufficient reason for damaging that inn to the utmost. The destructive spirit tends towards completeness; and any object once maimed or otherwise injured, is as readily doomed by unreasoning men as by unreasoning boys. Also the Seven Stars sheltered Spratt; and to some Sproxton men in front of that inn it was exasperating that Spratt should be safe and sound on a day when blows were going, and justice might be ren-

dered. And again, there was the general desirableness of being inside a public-house.

Felix had at last been willingly urged on to this spot. Hitherto swayed by the crowd, he had been able to do nothing but defend himself and keep on his legs; but he foresaw that the people would burst into the inn; he heard cries of "Spratt!" "Fetch him out!" "We'll pitch him out!" "Pummel him!" It was not unlikely that lives might be sacrificed; and it was intolerable to Felix to be witnessing the blind outrages of this mad crowd, and yet be doing nothing to counteract them. Even some vain effort would satisfy him better than mere gazing. Within the walls of the inn he might save some one. He went in with a miscellaneous set, who dispersed themselves with different objects—some to the taproom, and to search for the cellar; some up-stairs to search in all rooms for Spratt, or any one else perhaps, as a temporary scapegoat for Spratt. Guided by the screams of women, Felix at last got to a high up-stairs passage, where the landlady and some of her servants were running away in helpless terror from two or three half-tipsy men, who had been emptying a spirit-decanter in the bar. Assuming the tone of a mob-leader, he cried out, "Here, boys, here's better fun this way—come with me!" and drew the men

back with him along the passage. They reached the lower staircase in time to see the unhappy Spratt being dragged, coatless and screaming, down the steps. No one at present was striking or kicking him; it seemed as if he were being reserved for punishment on some wider area, where the satisfaction might be more generally shared. Felix followed close, determined, if he could, to rescue both assailers and assaulted from the worst consequences. His mind was busy with possible devices.

Down the stairs, out along the stones through the gateway, Spratt was dragged as a mere heap of linen and cloth rags. When he was got outside the gateway, there was an immense hooting and roaring, though many there had no grudge against him, and only guessed that others had the grudge. But this was the narrower part of the street; it widened as it went onwards, and Spratt was dragged on, his enemies crying, "We'll make a ring—we'll see how frightened he looks!"

"Kick him, and have done with him," Felix heard another say. "Let's go to Tiliot's vaults—there's more gin there!"

Here were two hideous threats. In dragging Spratt onward the people were getting very near to the lane leading up to Tiliot's. Felix kept as close as

he could to the threatened victim. He had thrown away his own stick, and carried a bludgeon which had escaped from the hands of an invader at the Seven Stars; his head was bare; he looked, to undiscerning eyes, like a leading spirit of the mob. In this condition he was observed by several persons looking anxiously from their upper windows, and finally observed to push himself, by violent efforts, close behind the dragged man.

Meanwhile the foremost among the constables, who, coming by the back way, had now reached the opening of Tiliot's Lane, discerned that the crowd had a victim amongst them. One spirited fellow, named Tucker, who was a regular constable, feeling that no time was to be lost in meditation, called on his neighbour to follow him, and with the sabre that happened to be his weapon got a way for himself where he was not expected, by dint of quick resolution. At this moment Spratt had been let go—had been dropped, in fact, almost lifeless with terror, on the street stones, and the men round him had retreated for a little space, as if to amuse themselves with looking at him. Felix had taken his opportunity; and seeing the first step towards a plan he was bent on, he sprang forward close to the cowering Spratt. As he did this, Tucker had cut his way

to the spot, and imagining Felix to be the destined executioner of Spratt—for any discrimination of Tucker's lay in his muscles rather than his eyes—he rushed up to Felix, meaning to collar him and throw him down. But Felix had rapid senses and quick thoughts ; he discerned the situation ; he chose between two evils. Quick as lightning he frustrated the constable, fell upon him, and tried to master his weapon. In the struggle, which was watched without interference, the constable fell undermost, and Felix got his weapon. He started up with the bare sabre in his hand. The crowd round him cried "Hurray!" with a sense that he was on their side against the constable. Tucker did not rise immediately; but Felix did not imagine that he was much hurt.

"Don't touch him!" said Felix. "Let him go. Here, bring Spratt, and follow me."

Felix was perfectly conscious that he was in the midst of a tangled business. But he had chiefly before his imagination the horrors that might come if the mass of wild chaotic desires and impulses around him were not diverted from any further attack on places where they would get in the midst of intoxicating and inflammable materials. It was not a moment in which a spirit like his could cal-

culate the effect of misunderstanding as to himself: nature never makes men who are at once energetically sympathetic and minutely calculating. He believed he had the power, and he was resolved to try, to carry the dangerous mass out of mischief till the military came to awe them—which he supposed, from Mr Crowe's announcement long ago, must be a near event.

He was followed the more willingly, because Tiliot's Lane was seen by the hindmost to be now defended by constables, some of whom had fire-arms; and where there is no strong counter-movement, any proposition to do something unspecified stimulates stupid curiosity. To many of the Sproxton men who were within sight of him, Felix was known personally, and vaguely believed to be a man who meant many queer things, not at all of an everyday kind. Pressing along like a leader, with the sabre in his hand, and inviting them to bring on Spratt, there seemed a better reason for following him than for doing anything else. A man with a definite will and an energetic personality acts as a sort of flag to draw and bind together the foolish units of a mob. It was on this sort of influence over men whose mental state was a mere medley of appetites and confused impressions, that Felix had

dared to count. He hurried them along with words of invitation, telling them to hold up Spratt and not drag him; and those behind followed him, with a growing belief that he had some design worth knowing, while those in front were urged along partly by the same notion, partly by the sense that there was a motive in those behind them, not knowing what the motive was. It was that mixture of pushing forward and being pushed forward, which is a brief history of most human things.

What Felix really intended to do, was to get the crowd by the nearest way out of the town, and induce them to skirt it on the north side with him, keeping up in them the idea that he was leading them to execute some stratagem by which they would surprise something worth attacking, and circumvent the constables who were defending the lanes. In the mean time he trusted that the soldiers would have arrived, and with this sort of mob, which was animated by no real political passion or fury against social distinctions, it was in the highest degree unlikely that there would be any resistance to a military force. The presence of fifty soldiers would probably be enough to scatter the rioting hundreds. How numerous the mob was, no one ever knew: many inhabitants afterwards were ready

to swear that there must have been at least two thousand rioters. Felix knew he was incurring great risks; but "his blood was up:" we hardly allow enough in common life for the results of that enkindled passionate enthusiasm which, under other conditions, makes world-famous deeds.

He was making for a point where the street branched off on one side towards a speedy opening between hedgerows, on the other towards the shabby wideness of Pollard's End. At this forking of the street there was a large space, in the centre of which there was a small stone platform, mounting by three steps, with an old green finger-post upon it. Felix went straight to this platform and stepped upon it, crying "Halt!" in a loud voice to the men behind and before him, and calling to those who held Spratt to bring him there. All came to a stand with faces towards the finger-post, and perhaps for the first time the extremities of the crowd got a definite idea that a man with a sabre in his hand was taking the command.

"Now!" said Felix, when Spratt had been brought on to the stone platform, faint and trembling, "has anybody got cord? if not, handkerchiefs knotted fast; give them to me."

He drew out his own handkerchief, and two or

three others were mustered and handed to him. He ordered them to be knotted together, while curious eyes were fixed on him. Was he going to have Spratt hanged? Felix kept fast hold of his weapon, and ordered others to act.

"Now, put it round his waist, wind his arms in, draw them a little backward—so! and tie it fast on the other side of the post."

When that was done, Felix said, imperatively,

"Leave him there—we shall come back to him; let us make haste; march along, lads! Up Park Street and down Hobb's Lane."

It was the best chance he could think of for saving Spratt's life. And he succeeded. The pleasure of seeing the helpless man tied up sufficed for the moment, if there were any who had ferocity enough to count much on coming back to him. Nobody's imagination represented the certainty that some one out of the houses at hand would soon come and untie him when he was left alone.

And the rioters pushed up Park Street, a noisy stream, with Felix still in the midst of them, though he was labouring hard to get his way to the front. He wished to determine the course of the crowd along a by-road called Hobb's Lane, which would have taken them to the other—the Duffield end of

the town. He urged several of the men round him, one of whom was no less a person than the big Dredge, our old Sproxton acquaintance, to get forward, and be sure that all the fellows would go down the lane, else they would spoil sport. Hitherto Felix had been successful, and he had gone along with an unbroken impulse. But soon something occurred which brought with a terrible shock the sense that his plan might turn out to be as mad as all bold projects are seen to be when they have failed.

Mingled with the more headlong and half-drunken crowd there were some sharp-visaged men who loved the irrationality of riots for something else than its own sake, and who at present were not so much the richer as they desired to be, for the pains they had taken in coming to the Treby election, induced by certain prognostics gathered at Duffield on the nomination-day that there might be the conditions favourable to that confusion which was always a harvest-time. It was known to some of these sharp men that Park Street led out towards the grand house of Treby Manor, which was as good—nay, better for their purpose than the bank. While Felix was entertaining his ardent purpose, these other sons of Adam were entertaining another

ardent purpose of their peculiar sort, and the moment was come when they were to have their triumph.

From the front ranks backward towards Felix there ran a new summons—a new invitation.

"Let us go to Treby Manor!"

From that moment Felix was powerless; a new definite suggestion overrode his vaguer influence. There was a determined rush past Hobb's Lane, and not down it. Felix was carried along too. He did not know whether to wish the contrary. Once on the road, out of the town, with openings into fields and with the wide park at hand, it would have been easy for him to liberate himself from the crowd. At first it seemed to him the better part to do this, and to get back to the town as fast as he could, in the hope of finding the military and getting a detachment to come and save the Manor. But he reflected that the course of the mob had been sufficiently seen, and that there were plenty of people in Park Street to carry the information faster than he could. It seemed more necessary that he should secure the presence of some help for the family at the Manor by going there himself. The Debarrys were not of the class he was wont to be anxious about; but Felix Holt's conscience was alive to the

accusation that any danger they might be in now was brought on by a deed of his. In these moments of bitter vexation and disappointment, it did occur to him that very unpleasant consequences might be hanging over him of a kind quite different from inward dissatisfaction; but it was useless now to think of averting such consequences. As he was pressed along with the multitude into Treby Park, his very movement seemed to him only an image of the day's fatalities, in which the multitudinous small wickednesses of small selfish ends, really undirected towards any larger result, had issued in widely-shared mischief that might yet be hideous.

The light was declining: already the candles shone through many windows of the Manor. Already the foremost part of the crowd had burst into the offices, and adroit men were busy in the right places to find plate, after setting others to force the butler into unlocking the cellars; and Felix had only just been able to force his way on to the front terrace, with the hope of getting to the rooms where he would find the ladies of the household and comfort them with the assurance that rescue must soon come, when the sound of horses' feet convinced him that the rescue was nearer than he had expected. Just as he heard the horses, he had approached the large

window of a room, where a brilliant light suspended from the ceiling showed him a group of women clinging together in terror. Others of the crowd were pushing their way up the terrace-steps and gravel-slopes at various points. Hearing the horses, he kept his post in front of the window, and, motioning with his sabre, cried out to the on-comers, "Keep back! I hear the soldiers coming." Some scrambled back, some paused automatically.

The louder and louder sound of the hoofs changed its pace and distribution. "Halt! Fire!" Bang! bang! bang!—came deafening the ears of the men on the terrace.

Before they had time or nerve to move, there was a rushing sound closer to them—again "Fire!" a bullet whizzed, and passed through Felix Holt's shoulder — the shoulder of the arm that held the naked weapon which shone in the light from the window.

Felix fell. The rioters ran confusedly, like terrified sheep. Some of the soldiers, turning, drove them along with the flat of their swords. The greater difficulty was to clear the invaded offices.

The Rector, who with another magistrate and several other gentlemen on horseback had accom-

panied the soldiers, now jumped on to the terrace, and hurried to the ladies of the family.

Presently there was a group round Felix, who had fainted, and, reviving, had fainted again. He had had little food during the day, and had been overwrought. Two of the group were civilians, but only one of them knew Felix, the other being a magistrate not resident in Treby. The one who knew Felix was Mr John Johnson, whose zeal for the public peace had brought him from Duffield when he heard that the soldiers were summoned.

"I know this man very well," said Mr Johnson. "He is a dangerous character — quite revolutionary."

It was a weary night; and the next day, Felix, whose wound was declared trivial, was lodged in Loamford Jail. He was committed on three counts —for having assaulted a constable, for having committed manslaughter (Tucker was dead from spinal concussion), and for having led a riotous onslaught on a dwelling-house.

Four other men were committed: one of them for possessing himself of a gold cup with the Debarry arms on it; the three others, one of whom was the collier Dredge, for riot and assault.

That morning Treby town was no longer in ter-

ror; but it was in much sadness. Other men, more innocent than the hated Spratt, were groaning under severe bodily injuries. And poor Tucker's corpse was not the only one that had been lifted from the pavement. It is true that none grieved much for the other dead man, unless it be grief to say, "Poor old fellow!" He had been trampled upon, doubtless where he fell drunkenly, near the entrance of the Seven Stars. This second corpse was old Tommy Trounsem, the bill-sticker—otherwise Thomas Transome, the last of a very old family-line.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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